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THE

Almoſt - Chriſtian

DISCOVERED:

OR,

The Falſe Profeſſor Tried and Caſt.

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF

SEVEN SERMONS,

FIRST PREACHED AT

SEPULCHRES,

LONDON, 1661.

And now, at the Importunity of Friends, made Public,

By MR. MATTHEW MEAD.

LUKE xvi. 14, 15. *And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things; and they derided him. And Jesus said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but GOD knoweth your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of GOD.*

FALKIRK:

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To the CONGREGATION AT SEPULCHRES,

Who were the Auditors of these SERMONS,

Grace and Peace be multiplied.

BELOVED,

WHAT the meaning of that Providence was, that called me to the occupation of my talent among you this Summer, will be best read and understood by the effects of it upon your own souls: The kindly increase of grace and holiness, in heart and life, can only prove it to have been in mercy. Where there is not the fruit of the word, there it becomes a judgment. The word travels with life or death, salvation or damnation; and bringeth forth one or other in every soul that hears it. I would not, for a world (were it in my power to make the choice), that my labours, which were meant and designed for the promotion of your immortal souls, to the glory of the other world, in a present pursuance of the things of your peace, should be found to have been a ministration of death and condemnation, in the great day of Jesus Christ. Yet this (the Lord knoweth) is the too

common effect of the moſt plain and powerful preaching of the goſpel. The waters of the Sanctuary do not always heal where they come; for there are miry and mariſhy places, that ſhall be given to ſalt, Ezek. xlvii. 11. The ſame word is elſewhere, in Scripture, rendered, *Barrenneſs: — He turneth a fruitful land into barrenneſs*, Pſal. cvii. 34. So that the judgment denounced upon theſe miry and mariſhy places, is that the curſe of barrenneſs ſhall reſt upon them notwithſtanding the waters of the ſanctuary overflow them.

It is ſad, but certain, that the goſpel inflicteth a death of its own, as well as the law; or elſe how are thoſe trees in Jude 12. ſaid to be *twice dead, plucked up by the roots?* Yea, that which in itſelf is the greateſt mercy, through the interpoſition of mens luſts, and the efficacy of this curſed ſin of unbelief, turneth to the greateſt judgment; as the richeſt and moſt generous wine, makes the ſharpeſt vinegar. Our Lord Chriſt himſelf (Rom v. 8.), the choiceſt mercy that the bowels of a God could bleſs a periſhing world with; whoſe coming

(himself bears witness, John iii. 16.) was no less errand than that of eternal life and blessedness to the lost and cursed sons of Adam: Yet to how many was he *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence?* Yea, *a gin, and a snare*, Isa ii. 14. And that to both the houses of Israel, the only professing people of God at that day in the world. And is he not a stone of stumbling in the ministry of the gospel to many professors to this very day, on which they fall and are broken? When he saith, *Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me*, Matth. xi. 6. he doth therein plainly suppose, that both in his person and doctrine, the generality of men would be offended in him.

Not that this is the design of Christ and the gospel, but it comes so to pass, thro' the corruptions of the hearts of men; whereby they make light of Christ and stand out against that life and grace which the Lord Jesus, by his blood, so dearly purchased; and is, by the preaching of the gospel, so freely tendered; the wilful refusal whereof, will as surely double our damnation, as the acceptance thereof will secure our eternal salvation.

O! conſider it is a thing of the moſt ſerious concernment in the world, how we carry ourſelves under the goſpel; and with what diſpoſitions and affections of heart and ſoul, ſeaſons of grace are entertained; this being taken into the conſideration, to make it weight, that we are the nearer to heaven or to hell, to ſalvation or to damnation, by every ordinance we ſit under. Boaſt not therefore of privileges enjoyed, with neglect of the important duties thereby required. Remember Capernaum's caſe, and tremble, Matth. xi. 23. As many go to heaven by the very gates of hell, ſo more go to hell by the gates of heaven, in that the number of them that profeſs Chriſt, is greater than the number of them that truly cloſe with Chriſt.

Beloved, I know the preaching of the goſpel hath proſylited many of you into a profeſſion; but I fear that but few of you are brought by it to a true cloſe with the Lord Chriſt for ſalvation. (I beſeech you, bear with my jealouſy, for it is the fruit of a tender love to your precious ſouls.) Moſt men are good Chriſtians, in the verdict of their own

opinions; but you know the law allow-eth no man to be a witness in his own cause, because their affection usually out-acteth conscience, and self-love balketh truth for its own interest.

The heart of man is the greatest impostor and cheat in the world; God himself adjusts it, Jer. xvii. 9. *The heart is deceitful above all things.* Some of the deceits whereof, ye will find discovered in this Treatise; which showeth you, that every grace hath its counterfeit, and that the highest profession may be, where true conversion is not.

The design hereof, is not to break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoaking flax (Matth. xii. 20.); not to discourage the weakest believer, but to awaken formal professors. I would not sad the hearts of any, whom God would not have made sad (Ezek. xiii. 22.), tho' I know, it is hard to rip up the dangerous estate and condition of a professing hypocrite, but that the weak Christian will think himself concerned in the discovery. And therefore, as I preached a sermon on Sincerity among you, for the support and encouragement of such,

at the end of this, ſo I did purpoſe to have printed it with this: But who can be maſter of his own purpoſes, that is (as I am) under ſuch daily variety of providences? Your kindly acceptation of this, will make me a debtor for that.

The Dedication hereof belongs to you on a double account; for as it had not been preached, but that love to your ſouls cauſed it, ſo it had much leſs been printed, but that your importunate deſire procured it: And therefore what entertainment ſoever it findeth in the world, yet I hope I may expect you will welcome it, eſpecially conſidering it was born under your roof, and therefore hopes to find favour in your eyes, and room in your hearts.

Accept it, I beſeech you, as a public acknowledgment of the engagments, which your great and (I think I may ſay) unparalelled reſpects have laid me under, which I can no way compenſate but by my prayers; and if you will take them for ſatisfaction, I do promiſe to be your remembrancer at the throne of grace, whilſt I am,

MATTHEW MEAD.

TO THE
READER.

READER,

I Know how cuſtomary it is, for men to aſcend the public ſtage, with premiſed apologies, for the weakneſs and unworthineſs of their labours, which is an argument that their deſires (either for the ſake of others profit, or their own credit, or both) are ſtretched beyond the tedder of their abilities, and that they covet to commend themſelves to the world's cenſure in a better dreſs than common infirmity will allow: For my own part, I may truly ſay with Gideon, *Behold, my thouſands is the meaneſt* (my talent is the ſmalleſt), *and I am the leaſt in my father's houſe*, Judges vi. 15. And, therefore, this appearance in public, is not the fruit of my own choice; which would rather have been on ſome other ſubject, wherein I ſtand, in ſome ſenſe, indebted to the world; or elſe in ſomewhat more digeſted, and poſſibly better fitted for common acceptation: but this is but to conſult the intereſt of a man's own name, which, in matters of this concernment, is no better than a ſowing to the fleſh, and the harveſt of ſuch a ſeed-time will be in corruption, Gal. vi 8.

Thou haſt here one of the ſadeſt conſiderations, imaginable, preſented to thee; and that is, How far it is poſſible a man may go in a profeſſion of religion, and yet, after all, fall ſhort of ſalvation: How far he may run, and yet not ſo

run as to obtain, 1 Cor. ix 14. This, I say, is sad, but not more sad than true; for our Lord Christ doth plainly attest it: *Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*, Luke xiii 14.

My design herein is, that the formal, sleepy professor may be awakened, and the close hypocrite discovered; but my fear is, that weak believers may be hereby discouraged: for, as it is hard to show, how low a child of God may fall into sin, and yet have true grace, but that the sinner will be apt thereupon to presume; so it is as hard to show how high an hypocrite may rise in a profession, and yet have no grace, but that the believer will be apt thereupon to despond. The prevention whereof, I have carefully endeavoured, by showing, that tho' a man may go thus far, and yet be but almost a Christian, yet a man may fall short of this, and be a true Christian notwithstanding. Judge not, therefore, thy state by any one character thou findest laid down of a false professor, but read the whole, and then make a judgment: For as I have cared, not to give childrens bread to dogs, (Matth. xv. 16) so not to use the dog-whip to scare the children; yet I could wish that this book might fall into the hands of such only whom it chiefly concerns, who have a name to live, and yet are dead, Rev iii. 1. being busy with the form of godliness, but strangers to the power of it, 2 Tim. iii 5. These are the proper subjects of this treatise: And the Lord follow it with his blessing, where-ever it comes,

that it may be an awakening word to all ſuch, and eſpecially to that generation of profligate profeſſors (with which this age abounds), who, if they keep to their church, bow the knee, talk out a few prayers, and, at a good time, receive the ſacrament, think they do enough for heaven; and hereupon judge their condition ſafe, and their ſalvation ſure, tho' there be a hell of ſin in their hearts, and the poiſon of aſps is under their lips, Rom. iii. 13. their minds being as yet carnal and unconverted, and their converſations filthy and unſanctified: If eternal life be of ſo eaſy attainment, and to be had at ſo cheap a rate, what meant our Lord Chriſt to tell us, *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and there be few that find it*, Matth. vii. 14. And why ſhould the apoſtle perplex us with ſuch a needleſs injunction, *To give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure*, 2 Pet. i. 10. Certainly, therefore, it is no ſuch eaſy thing to be ſaved, as many make it; and that thou wilt ſee plainly in the following diſcourſe. I have been ſomewhat ſhort in the Application of it, and therefore let me here be thy remembrancer, in five important duties.

Firſt, Take heed of reſting in a form of godlineſs, as if duties *ex opere operato*, could confer grace. A lifeleſs formality is advanced to a very high eſteem in the world, as a cab of doves dung was ſold, in the famine of Samaria, at a very dear rate, 2 Kings vi. 25. Alas! the profeſſion of godlineſs is but a ſandy foundation, to build-

the hope of an immortal ſoul upon for eternity: Remember, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt called him a fooliſh builder, that founded his houſe upon the ſand, Matth vii. 26 and the ſad event proved it ſo, for it fell, and great was the fall of it, ver. 27. O! therefore lay thy foundation, by faith, upon the rock Chriſt Jeſus; look to Chriſt thro' all, and reſt upon Chriſt in all, 1 Cor. iii. 12.

Secondly, Labour to ſee an excellency in the power of godlineſs, a beauty in the life of Chriſt. If the means of grace have a lovelineſs in them, ſurely grace itſelf hath much more; for, *Finis dat amabilitatem mediis*, the goodneſs of the means lies in its ſuitableneſs and ſerviceableneſs to the end: the form of godlineſs hath no goodneſs in it, any farther than it becomes uſeful to the ſoul in the power and practice of godlineſs. The life of holineſs is the only excellent life; it is the life of ſaints and angels in heaven, yea, it is the life of God himſelf. As it is a great proof of the baſeneſs and filthineſs of ſin, that ſinners ſeek to cover it; ſo it is a great proof of the excellency of godlineſs, that ſo many pretend to it. The very hypocrite's fair profeſſion pleads the cauſe of religion, altho' the hypocrite is then really worſt when he is ſeemingly beſt.

Thirdly, Look upon things to come, as the greateſt realities; for *non entis & non apparentis idem eſt affectus*; things that are not believed, work no more upon the affections, than if they had no being; and this is the grand reaſon why the generality of men ſuffer their affections to

lacquey after the world, setting the creature in the place of God in their hearts.

Most men judge of the reality of things by their visibility and proximity to sense; and therefore the choice of that wretched cardinal becomes their option, who would not leave his part in Paris, for his part in Paradise: Sure whatever his interest might be in the former, he had little enough in the latter. Well may covetousness be called idolatry, when it thus chooses the world for its God, Col. iii. 5.

O consider! eternity is no dream: Hell and the worm that never dies (Matth. xix. 44.), is no melancholy conceit: Heaven is no feigned Elysium. There is the greatest reality imaginable in these things, tho' they are spiritual, and out of the ken of sense, yet they are real, and within the view of faith: Look not therefore at the things which are seen, but look at the things which are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal, 2 Cor. iv. 18.

Fourthly, Set a high rate upon thy soul; what we lightly prize, we easily part with: Many men sell their souls (at the rate of profane Esau's birth-right) for a morsel of bread, Heb. xii. 20. Nay, for that which (in the sense of the holy Ghost) is not bread, Isa. lv. 2. O consider! thy soul is the most precious and valuable jewel in the world; it is the most beautiful piece of God's workmanship in the whole creation; it is that which bears the image of God, and which

was bought with the blood of the Son of God, 1 Pet. i. 18 19 And shall we not set a value upon it, and count it precious?

The apostle Peter speaks of three very precious things: A precious Christ, 1 Pet. ii. 7. Precious Promises, 2 Pet. i. 4. And precious Faith, 2 Pet. i 1.

Now the preciousness of all these, lies in their usefulness to the soul. Christ is precious, as being the Redeemer of precious souls: The Promises are precious, as making over this precious Christ to precious souls: Faith is precious, as bringing a precious soul to close with a precious Christ, as he is held forth in the precious promises. O! take heed that thou be not found overvaluing other things, and undervaluing thy soul. Shall thy flesh, nay, thy beasts be loved, and shall thy soul be slighted? Wilt thou cloath and pamper thy body, and yet take no care of thy soul? This is as if a man should feed his dog, and starve his child: *Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God shall destroy both it and them,* 1 Cor. vi. 13. O! let not a tottering perishing carcase have all your time and care, as if the life and salvation of thy soul were not worth the while.

Lastly, Meditate much on the suddenness and strictness of that judgment-day which thou and I must pass through, into an everlasting state; wherein God, the impartial Judge, will require an account at our hands, of all our talents and betrustments: We must then account for time,

how we have ſpent that; for eſtate, how we have employed that; for ſtrength, how we have laid out that; for afflictions and mercies, how they they have been improved; for the relations we ſtood in here, how they have been diſcharged; and for ſeaſons and means of grace, how they have been huſbanded; and look how we have ſowed here, ſo ſhall we reap hereafter. Gal. vi 7.

Reader, theſe are things that, of all other, deſerve moſt of, and call loudeſt for our utmoſt care and endeavour, tho', by moſt. leaſt minded. To conſider what a ſpirit of Atheiſm (if we may judge the tree by the fruits, Matth vii. 19, 20. and the principle by the practice) the hearts of moſt men are filled with, who live as if God were not to be ſerved, nor Chriſt to be ſought, nor luſts to be mortified, nor ſelf to be denied, nor the Scriptures to be believed, nor the judgment-day to be minded, nor hell to be feared, nor heaven to be deſired, nor the ſoul to be valued, but give up themſelves to a worſe than brutiſh ſenſuality; to work all uncleanneſs with with greedineſs. living without God in the world, Eph. iv. 19. and ii. 12. This is a meditation fit enough to break our hearts, if, at leaſt, we were of holy David's temper, who beheld the tranſgreſſors, and was grieved, Pſal. cxix 158 and had rivers of water running down his eyes; becauſe men kept not God's laws, ver. 136. The prevention and correction of this ſoul-deſtroying diſtemper, is not the leaſt deſign of this Treatiſe now put into thine hand: Tho' the chief virtue

of this receipt lies in its ſovereign uſe, to aſſuage and cure the ſwelling tympany of hypocriſy, yet it may ſerve alſo (with God's bleſſing) as a plaiſter for the plague-ſore of profaneneſs, if timely applied by ſerious meditation, and carefully kept on by conſtant prayers.

Reader, expect nothing of curioſity or quaintneſs, for then I ſhall deceive thee: But if thou wouldſt have a touch-ſtone for the trial of thy ſtate, poſſibly this may ſtead thee. If thou art either a ſtranger to a profeſſion, or an hypocrite under a profeſſion, then read and tremble, for thou art the man here pointed at:

Mutato nomine de te
Fabula narratur ——— Horat.

But if the kingdom of God be come with power into thy ſoul, if Chriſt be formed in thee, if thy heart be upright and ſincere with God, then read and rejoice, Mark ix. 1. Luke xvii. 21.

I fear I have tranſgreſſed the bounds of an Epiſtle; the Mighty GOD, whoſe prerogative it is to teach to profit (Iſa. xlviii 17.) whether by the tongue, or the pen, or ſpeaking, or writing, bleſs this Tract, that it may be to thee as a cloud of rain to the dry ground, dropping fatneſs to thy ſoul, that ſo thy fleece being watered with the dew of heaven, thou mayſt grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt (1 Pet iii. 18): in whom I am

Thy Friend and Servant,

LONDON, *October*, 29.
1661. *MATTH. MEAD.*

THE
ALMOST-CHRISTIAN
DISCOVERED:

ACTS xxvi. 28.

Almost, thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

IN this chapter you have the apostle Paul's apology, and defensative plea which he makes for himself against those blind Jews, which did so maliciously prosecute him before Aggrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the council.

In which plea, he doth chiefly insist upon three things.

The manner of his life before conversion.

The manner of his conversion.

The manner of his life after conversion.

How he lived before conversion, he tells you from ver. 4.—13.

How God wrought on him to conversion, he tells you from ver. 13 —18.

How he lived after conversion, he tells you from ver. 19 —23.

Before conversion he was very Pharisaical.

The manner of his conversion was very wonderful.

The fruit of his conversion was very remarkable.

Before conversion, he persecuted the gospel which others preached. After conversion, he preached the gospel which himself had persecuted.

While he was a persecutor of the gospel, the Jews loved him; but now that (by the grace of God) he was become a preacher of the gospel, now the Jews hate him, and sought to kill him, ver. 21

He was once against Christ, and then many were for him; but now that he was for Christ, all were against him: His being an enemy to Jesus, made others his friends; but when he came to own Jesus, then they became his enemies.

And this was the great charge they had against him, That of a great opposer, he was become a great professor.

Because God had changed him, therefore this enraged them. As if they would be the worse, because God had made him better. God had wrought on him by grace, and they seem to envy him the grace of God. *Hic vir invidet mihi gratiam Christi.*

He preached no treason, nor sowed no sedition, only he preached repentance, and faith in Christ, and the resurrection; and for this he was called into question.

This is the breviat and sum of Paul's defence, and plea for himself, which you find in the sequel of the chapter, had a different effect upon his Judges.

Festus seems to censure him, ver. 24. Agrippa seems to be convinced by him, ver. 28. The whole bench seem to acquit him, ver 30, 31. Festus he thinks Paul was beside himself Agrippa he is almost persuaded to be such an one as himself. Festus thinks him mad, because he did not understand the doctrine of Christ, and the resurrection: *Much learning hath made thee mad. Dei Sapientia, mundi est insania*, Malc. in loc.

Agrippa he is so affected with his Plea, that he is almost wrought into his principle; Paul pleads so effectually for his religion, that Agrippa seems to be upon the turning point to his profession. *Putat hominem esse fanaticum*, Mar. in loc.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

These words make some debate among the learned. I shall not trouble you with the various hints upon them by Valla, Simplicius, Beza, Erasmus, and others. I shall take the words as we read them, and they shew what an efficacy, Paul's doctrine had upon Agrippa's conscience. Tho' he would not be converted, yet he could not but be convinced. His conscience was touched, tho' his heart was not renewed.

Observ. There is that in religion which carries its own evidence along with it, even to the consciences of ungodly men.

Thou persuadest me; the word is from the Hebrew PATHAH, and it signifies both *suadere*

and *persuadere*, either to use arguments to prevail, or to prevail by the arguments used. *Suadere est conantis, persuadere est officientis*. Beza.

Now it is to be taken in the latter sense here, to shew the influence of Paul's argument upon Agrippa, which had almost proselyted him to the profession of Christianity; *Suadet qui consulit; persuadet qui quo vult inducit Hominem*, Eras.

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

I hope I need not tell you what a Christian is. Tho' I am persuaded, many that are called Christians, do not know what a Christian is; or if they do, yet they do not know what it is to be a Christian.

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ; one that believes in, and follows Christ; as he that embraces, the doctrine of Arminus, is called an Arminian; and as he that owns the doctrine and way of Luther, is called a Lutheran; so he that embraces, and owns, and follows the doctrine of Jesus Christ, he is called a Christian.

The word is taken more largely, and more strictly; more largely, and so all that profess Christ come in the flesh, are called Christians, in opposition to Heathens that do not know Christ, and to the poor blind Jews that will not own Christ; and to the Mahometan that prefers Mahomet above Christ.

But now in Scripture, the word is of a more strict and narrow acceptation, it is used only to denominate the true disciples and followers of Christ, Acts xi. 26. The disciples were first

called Christians at Antioch. 1 Pet. iv. 16. If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: That is, a member, a disciple of Christ; and so in the text, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

The word is used but in these three places, (as I find) in all the New Testament, and in each of them it signifies in the sense aforementioned.

The Italians make the name, to be a name of reproach among them, and do usually abuse the word Christian, to signify a fool. *Fulk. Not. on Rem. Test.*

But if, as the apostle saith. The preaching of Christ, is to the world foolishness, 1 Cor. i. 18. It is no wonder, that the disciples of Christ are to them the world's fools.

Yet it is true (in a sound sense) so they are. For the whole of godliness is a mystery, 1 Tim. iii 16.

A man must die, that would live; he must be empty, that would be full; he must be lost, that would be found; he must have nothing, that would have all things; he must be blind, that would have illumination; he must be condemned, that would have redemption; so he must be a fool, that would be a Christian: *If any amongst you seem to be wise, let him become a Fool, that he may be wise,* 1 Cor iii 18

He is the true Christian, that is the world's fool, but wise to salvation.

Thus you have the sense and meaning of the words, briefly explained.

The text needs no division, and yet it is pity, the almost should not be divided from the Christian.

Tho' it is of little avail to divide them as they are linked in the text, unless I could divide them as they are united in your hearts, this would be a blessed division, if the almost might be taken from the Christian; that so you may not be only *premodum* but *admodum*; not only almost, but altogether Christians.

This is God's work to effect it; but it is our duty to persuade to it; and O that God would help me to manage this subject so, that you may say in the conclusion, Thou persuadest me (not almost but) altogether to be a Christian.

The observation that I shall propound to handle, is this.

Doctrine, There are very many in the world, that are almost, and yet but almost Christians; Many that are near heaven, and yet are never the nearer; many that are within a little of salvation, and yet shall never enjoy the least salvation: they are within the sight of heaven, and yet shall never have a sight of God.

There are two sad expressions in scripture, which I cannot but take notice of in this place; The one is concerning the truly righteous: the other is concerning the seemingly righteous.

It is said of the truly righteous, he shall scarcely be saved, 1 Pet. iv. 18. And it is said of the

seemingly righteous, he shall be almost saved. *Thou art not far from the kingdom of God,* Mark xii. 24.

The righteous shall be saved with a scarely, that is, through much difficulty: He shall go to Heaven, through many sad fears of hell.

The hypocrite shall be saved with an almost, that is, he shall go to hell through many fair hopes of heaven. *Quod vix fit, fit; quod fere, non fit.*

There are two things arise from hence, of very serious meditation. The one is, how oft a believer may miscarry, how low he may fall, and yet have true grace. The other is, how far an hypocrite may go in the way to heaven, how high he may attain, and yet have no grace.

The saint may be cast down very near to hell, and yet shall never come there; and the hypocrite may be lifted up very near to heaven, and yet never come there.

The saint may almost perish, and yet be saved eternally; the hypocrite may almost be saved, and yet perish finally. For the saint at worst, is really a believer; and the hypocrite at best, is really a sinner.

Before I handle the doctrine, I must premise three things, which are of great use for the establishing of weak believers, that they may not be shaken and discouraged, by this doctrine.

First, There is nothing in the doctrine that should be matter of stumbling, or discouragement to weak Christians.

The gospel doth not speak these things to wound believers, but to awaken sinners, and formal professors.

As there is none more averse than weak believers, to apply the promises and comforts of the gospel to themselves, for whom they are properly designed: So there are none more ready than they, to apply the threats and severest things of the world to themselves, for whom they were never intended.

As the disciples, when Christ told them, *One of you shall betray me*, Mat. xxvi. 15. they that were innocent, suspected themselves most, and therefore cry out, *Master, is it I?*

So weak Christians, when they hear sinners reproved, or the hypocrite laid open in the ministry of the word, they presently cry out, *Is it I?*

It is the hypocrite's fault, to sit under the trials and discoveries of the word, and yet not to mind them.

And it is the weak Christians fault, to draw sad conclusions of their own state, from promises which nothing concern them.

There is indeed great use of such doctrine, as this is to all believers.

1. To make them look to their standing, upon what bottom they are, and to see that the foundation of their hope be well laid, that they build

not upon the sand, but upon a rock, Matth. vii. 24. 26.

2. It helps to raise our admiration of the distinguishing love of God, in bringing us into the way everlasting, when so many perish from the way; and in over-powering our souls into a true conversion, when so many take up with a graceless profession, Psal. cxxxix. 24

3. It incites to that excellent duty of heart-searching, that so we approve ourselves to God in sincerity, 1 Cor. xiii. 5

4. It engages the soul in double diligence, that it may be found not only believing, but persevering in faith to the end.

These duties (and such as these) make this doctrine of use to all believers; but they ought not to make use of it as a stumbling block, in the way of their peace and comfort.

My design in preaching on this subject, is not to make sad the souls of those, whom Christ will not have made sad; I would bring water not to quench the flax that is smoaking, Mat. xii. 20. but to put out that false fire, that is of the sinners own kindling, lest walking all his days by the light thereof, he shall at last ly down in sorrow, Isa. l. 1.

My aim is to level the mountain of the sinner's confidence, not to weaken the hand of the believer's faith and dependence; to awaken and bring in secure formal sinners, not to discourage weak believers.

Secondly, I would premise this: Tho' many may go far (very far) in the way to heaven, and yet fall short; yet that soul that hath the least true grace, shall never fall short: *The righteous shall hold on his way*, Job xvii. 9.

Tho' some may do very much in a way of duty (as I shall show hereafter), and yet miscarry; yet that soul that doth duty with the least sincerity, shall never miscarry; *For he saveth the upright in heart*, Psal. vii. 10.

The least measure of true grace is as saving as the greatest: It saves as surely, tho' not so comfortably. The least grace gives a full interest in the blood of Christ, whereby we are throughly purged; and it gives a full interest in the strength and power of Christ, whereby we shall be certainly preserved.

Christ keeps faith in the soul, and faith keeps the soul in Christ, and so we are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, 1 Pet. i. 6.

Thirdly, I would premise this: They that can hear such truths as this, without serious reflection and self-examination, I must suspect the goodness of their condition.

You will suspect that man to be next door to a bankrupt, that never casts up his shop, nor looks over his books; and I as verily think that man an hypocrite, that never searches nor deals with his own heart.

He that goes on in a road of duties, without any rub or doubting of his state, I doubt no man's state more than his.

When we see a man sick, and yet not sensible, we conclude, the tokens of death are upon him.

So when sinners have no sense of their spiritual condition, it is plain, that they are dead in sin, the tokens of eternal death are upon them. These things being premised (which I desire you would carry along in your mind, while we travel through this subject) I come to speak to the proposition more distinctly and closely.

Doct. That there are very many in the world that are almost, and yet but almost Christians.

I shall demonstrate the truth of the proposition, and then proceed to a more distinct prosecution.

1. I shall demonstrate the truth of the proposition, and I shall do it by Scripture-evidence, which speaks plain and fully to the case.

2. The young man in the gospel is an eminent proof of this truth, in Mat. xix. 16.--23. There you read of one that came to Christ, to learn of him the way to heaven. *Good Master, what good things shall I do, that I may have eternal life?* Our Lord Christ tells him, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;* and when Christ tells him which, he answers, *Lord, all these have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?* ver. 17.--20.

Now do but see how far this man went.

1. He obeyed. He did not only hear the commands of God, but he kept them: Now the scripture saith, *Blessed is he that hears the word of God, and keeps it*, Luke xi 8.

2. He obeyed universally. Not this, or that command, but both this, and that: He did not halve it with God, or pick and choose which were easiest to be done, and leave the rest: No, but he obeys all, *All these have I kept.*

3. He obeyed constantly. Not in a fit of zeal only, but in a continual series of duty: His goodness was not (as Ephraim's, Hosea vi. 4) like the morning dew that passeth away, no, *All these things have I kept from my youth up.*

4. He professeth his desire to know and do more; to perfect that which was lacking of his obedience: and therefore he goes to Christ, to instruct him in his duty, *Master, what lack I yet?* Now, would you not think this a good man? Alas! how few go this far?

And yet as far as he went, he went not far enough: He was almost, and yet but almost a Christian; for he was an unsound hypocrite: he forsakes Christ at last, and cleaves to his lust, ver. 21.

This then is a full of proof of the truth of the doctrine.

A second proof of it, is that of the parable of the virgins, Matth. xxv. 1. and so on.

See what a progress they make, how far they go in a profession of Christ.

1. They are called Virgins. Now, this is a name given in the scripture, both in the old Testament and New, to the saints of Christ, Psal. xlv. 11 1 Cor. xi. 2, 3. *The Virgins love thee*, Cant. i. 3 So Rev. xiv 4 the one hundred and forty four thousand that stood with the Lamb on mount Sion, are called Virgins. They are called Virgins, because they are not defiled, with the corruptions that are in the world thro' lust, 1 Pet. i 4 Mat xxv. 1.

Now these here seem to be of that sort, for they are called virgins.

2. They take their lamps; that is, they made a profession of Christ.

3. They had some kind of oil in their lamps, as appears, ver. 8 They had some convictions, and some faith (tho' not the faith of God's elect) to keep their profession alive, to keep the lamp burning. *Hi non sunt quadscunque anima sed tales qui habent catholicam fidem, et habere videntur bona Opera in Ecclesia Dei.* Aug. de ser. Dom. Ser. 13.

4. They went, Their profession was not an idle profession, they did perform duties, frequent ordinances, and do many things commanded; they made a pregress: *They went.*

5. They went forth. They went, and outwent, they left many behind them; this speaks out their separation from the world.

6. They went with the wise virgins. They joined themselves to those who had joined themselves to the Lord, and were the companions of

them that were the companions of Christ.

7. They go forth to meet the Bridegroom. Cant. i. 7. This speaks out their owning and seeking after Christ.

8. When they heard the cry of the Bridegroom coming, they arose and trimmed their lamps, ver. 7. They profess Christ more highly, hoping now to go in with the Bridegroom.

9. They sought for the true grace. Now; do not we say the desires of grace, are grace; and so they are, if true and timely, if sound and seasonable.

Why? lo here a desire of grace in these virgins; *Give us of your oil.*

It was a desire of true grace, but it was not a true desire of grace; it was not true, because not timely; unsound, as being unseasonable; it was too late, ver. 8

Their folly was in not taking oil, when they took their lamps; their time of seeking grace was, when they came to Christ, it was too late to seek it when Christ came to them. They should have sought for that, when they took up their profession; it was too late to seek it, at the coming of the Bridegroom.

And therefore they were shut out, ver. 10. and tho' they cry for entrance, *Lord, Lord, open to us*, ver. 11. yet the Lord Christ tells them, *I know you not*, ver. 12.

You see how far these virgins go in a profession of Jesus Christ, and how long they continue in it, even till the Bridegroom came; they go to

thevery doors of heaven, and there (like the Sodomites) perish with their hands upon the very thresholds of glory.

They were almost Christians, and yet but almost; almost saved, and yet perish.

You that are professors of the gospel of Christ, stand and tremble: If they that have gone beyond us, fall short of heaven, what shall become of us, that fall short of them?

If they that are Virgins, that profess Christ, that have some faith in their profession, (such as it is) that have some fruit in their faith, that out-strip others, that seek Christ, that improve their profession, and suit themselves to their profession; nay, that seek grace, if such as these be but almost Christians. Lord, what then are we?

If these two witnesses be not sufficient to prove the truth, and confirm the credit of the proposition, take a third, and that shall be from the old testament, Isa. lvii. 2. See what God saith of that people: He gives them a very high character for a choice people, one would think.

"They seek me daily, they delight to know "my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, "and forsook not the ordinances of their God, "they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they "take delight in approaching to God."

See how far these went; if God had not said they were rotten and unsound, we should have taken them for the he-goats before the flock, Jer. l. 8. and ranked them among the worthies: Pray observe,

1. They seek God. Now, this is the proper character of a true saint, to seek God. True saints are called seekers of God: *This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob*; or, *O God of Jacob*, Psal. xxiv. 6.

Lo! here a generation of them that seek God, and are not these the saints of God? Nay, farther;

2. They seek him daily. Here is diligence backed with continuance day by day; that is, every day from day to day. They did not seek him by fits and girds, nor in a time of trouble and affliction only, as many do.

Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer, when thy chastning was upon them, Isa. xxvi. 16. Many when God visits them, then they visit him, but not till then: When God poureth out his afflictions, then they pour out their supplications. This is seamens devotion; when the Storms have brought them to their wits end, then they cry to the Lord in their trouble, Psalm cvii. 27, 28. John i. 5. Many never cry to God, till they are at their wits end; they never come to God for help, so long as they can help themselves.

But now these here whom God speaks of, are more zealous in their devotion; the others make a virtue of necessity, but these seem to make conscience of duty; for, saith God, *They seek me daily*.

Sure this is (one would think) a note of sincerity.

Job saith of the hypocrite, *Will they always call upon God?* Job xxvii. 10 Surely no; but now this people call upon God always, They seek him daily, certainly these are no hypocrites.

3. Saith God, *They delight to know my ways.* Sure this frees them from the suspicion of hypocrisy; for, Job xxi. 14 *They say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

4 They, as a nation that did righteousness. Not only as a nation that spake righteousness, or knew righteousness, or professed righteousness; but as a nation that did righteousness, that practised nothing but what was just and right. They appeared to the Judgment of the world, as good as the best.

5. They forsook not the ordinances of their God. They seem true to their principles, constant to their profession, better than many among us, that cast off duties, and forsake the ordinances of God; but these hold out in their profession, *They forsook not the ordinances of God.*

6. *They ask of me*, saith God, *the ordinances of Justice.* They will not make their own will, the rule of right and wrong, but the law and will of God; and therefore in all their dealings with men, they desire to be guided and counselled by God. *They ask of me the ordinances of Justice*

7. *They take delight in approaching to God.* Sure this cannot be the guize of an hypocrite; *Will he delight himself in the Almighty?* saith Job, chap. xxvii. 10.: No, he will not.

Tho' God is the chief delight of a man (having every thing in him to render him lovely, as was said of Titus Vespasian) *Delicia humani generis;* yet the hypocrite will not delight in God. *Hypocrita neque Deum neque divina habet in deliciis.*

Till the affections are made spiritual, there is no affection to things that are spiritual. God is a spiritual good, and therefore hypocrites cannot delight in God. But these are a people that delight in approaching to God.

8. They were a people that were much in fasting, as you may see, verse 3 *Wherefore have we fasted*, say they, *and thou seest not?* Now this is a duty, that doth not suppose and require truth of grace only in the heart, but strength of grace.

No man, saith our Lord Christ, *puts new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles break, and the wine run out*, Matth. ix 17.

New wine is strong, and old bottles weak, and the strong wine breaks the weak Vessel; this is a reason Christ gives, why his disciples, who were newly converted (and but weak as yet), were not exercised with this austere discipline.

But this people here mentioned, were a people that fasted often, afflicted their souls much, wore themselves out by frequent practices of humiliation. *Assembl Annot. upon the place*

Sure therefore, this was new wine in new bottles; this must needs be a people strong in grace: Here seems to be grace not only in

truth, but also in growth, and yet for all this, they were no better than a generation of hypocrites; they made a goodly progress, and went far, but yet they went not far enough; they were cast off by God after all. I hope by this time the truth of the point is sufficiently avouched and confirmed; that a man may be (yea, very many are) almost, and yet (no more than) but almost Christians.

Now for the more distinct prosecution of the point,

1. I shall shew you, step by step, how far a man may go, what attainments he may reach unto, how spacious and singular a Progress he may make in religion, and yet be but almost a Christian when all is done.

2. I will shew you whence it is, that many men go so far, as that they are almost Christians.

3. That they are but almost Christians, when they have gone thus far.

4. What the reason is, why men that go thus far as to be almost Christians, yet go no further than to be almost Christians.

Quest. 1. How far a man may go in the way to heaven, and yet be but almost a Christian?

Answ. This I shall shew you, in twenty several steps.

1. A man may have much knowledge, much light; he may know much of God, and his will, much of Christ, and his way, and yet be but almost a Christian.

For tho' there can be no grace without knowledge, yet there may be much knowledge where there is no grace. Illumination often goes before, when conversion never follows after. The subject of knowledge is the understanding, the subject of holiness is the will. Now a man may have his understanding enlightned, and yet his will not at all sanctified: He may have an understanding to know God, and yet want a will to obey God. The Apostle tells us of some, that when they knew God, yet they glorified him not as God, Rom. i. 21.

To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the head, and heat in the heart; knowledge in the understanding, and zeal in the affections.

Some have zeal and no knowledge, that is blind devotion: Some have knowledge and no zeal, that is fruitless speculation. But where knowledge is joined with zeal, that makes a true Christian.

Object. But is it not said, *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent?* John xvii. 3.

Solution. It is not every knowledge of God and Christ, that interests the soul in life eternal. For why then do the devils perish? they have more knowledge of God, than all the men in the world: For though by their fall they lost their holiness, yet they lost not their knowledge.

They are called DAIMONES from their knowledge, and yet they are DIABOLON from their malice, devils still.

Knowledge may fill the head, but it will never better the heart, if there be not somewhat else. The Pharisees had much knowledge; *Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, &c.* Rom. ii. 17, 18. and yet they were a generation of hypocrites. *Sinite sapientes hujus mundi sapienter descendere ad infernum.*

Alas! how many have gone loaded with knowledge to hell?

Tho' it is true, that it is life eternal to know God, and Jesus Christ; yet it is as true, that many do know God, and Jesus Christ, that shall never see life eternal.

There is, you must know, a two-fold knowledge; one is common, but not saving; the other is not common, but saving: Common knowledge is that which floats in the head, but doth not influence nor affect the heart. This knowledge reprobates may have; Balaam saw Christ from the top of the rocks, and from the hills, Num. xxiii. 10.

Naturalists say, That there is a pearl in the Toad's head, and yet her belly is full of poison. The French have a berry which they call *uve d'espine*, the grape of a thorn.

The common knowledge of Christ, is the pearl in the Toad's head; the grape that grows upon thorns, it may be found in men unsanctified.

And then there is a saving knowledge of God and Christ, which doth include the assent of the the mind, and the consent of the will: This is a knowledge that implies faith; *By his knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many*, Isa. liii. 11.

And this is that knowledge which leads to eternal life. Now, whatever the measure of knowledge is, which a man may have of God, and of Jesus Christ, yet if it be not this saving knowledge, knowledge joined with affection and application, he is but almost a Christian.

He only knows God aright, who knows how to obey him, and obeys according to his knowledge of him, *A good understanding have all they that do his commandments*, Psal. cxi. 10.

All knowledge without this, makes a man but like Nebuchadnezzar's image, with a head of gold, and feet of clay.

Some know, but to know.

Some know, to be known.

Some know, to practise what they know.

Now to know, but to know, that is curosity.

To know, to be known, that is vain glory.

But to know, to practise what we know, that is gospel-duty.

This makes a man a compleat Christian; the other without this, makes a man almost, and yet but almost a Christian.

2. A man may have great and eminent gifts, yea, spiritual gifts, and yet be but almost a Christian. The gift of prayer, is a spiritual gift, now

this a man may have, and yet be but almost a Christian; for the gift of prayer is one thing, the grace of prayer is another.

The gift of preaching and prophesying, is a spiritual gift, 1 Cor. xii. 10. Now this a man may have, and yet be but almost a Christian. Judas was a great preacher; so were they that came to Christ, and said, *Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out Devils*, &c. Mat. vii. 22.

You must know that it is not gifts, but grace which makes a Christian. For,

1. Gifts are from a common work of the Spirit. Now a man may partake of all the common gifts of the Spirit, and yet be a reprobate; for therefore they are called common, because they are indifferently dispensed by the Spirit to good and bad, to them that are believers, and to them that are not.

They that have grace, have gifts; and they that have no grace, may have the same gifts; for the Spirit worketh in both: Nay, in this sense, he that hath no grace, may be under a greater work of the Spirit as to this thing, than he that hath most grace; A graceless professor may have greater gifts, than the most holy believer. He may out-pray, and out-preach, and out-do them; but they in sincerity and integrity out-go him.

2 Gifts are for the use and good of others; they are given, *in ordine ad alium*, as the schoolmen speak, for the profiting and edifying of

others; so saith the apostle, 1 Cor. xii. 7. *They are given to profit withal*, Eph iv. 12. *Dona dantur in adjutorium gratiæ.*

Now a man may edify another by his gifts, and yet be unedified himself. He may be profitable to another, and yet unprofitable to himself.

A lame man may with his crutch point to thee the right way, and yet not be able to walk in it himself. A crooked taylor may make a suit to fit a straight body, tho' it fit not him that made it, because of his crookedness.

The church (Christ's garden inclosed) may be watered through a wooden gutter; the sun may give light through a sluttish window; and the field may be well sowed, with a dirty hand. The raven was an unclean bird, yet God makes use of her to feed Elijah; tho' she was not good meat, yet it was good meat she brought, 1 Kings xvii 6.

The efficacy of the word doth not depend upon the authority of him that speaks it, but upon the authority of the God that blesses it: So that another may be converted by my preaching, and yet I may be a Cast-away notwithstanding. Balaam makes a clear and rare prophesy of Christ, and yet he hath no benefit by Christ: *There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall arise out of Israel.* But yet Balaam shall have no benefit by it: *I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh*, Num xxiv. 17.

God may use a man's gifts to bring another unto Christ, when he himself, whose gifts God

used, may be a stranger unto Christ; one man may confirm another in the faith, and yet himself may be a stranger to the faith. Pendleton strengthens and confirms Sanders in queen Mary's days, to stand in the truth he had preached, and to seal it with his blood, and yet afterwards plays the apostate himself, *Acts and Mon. last edit.* 3 *v p.* 141.

Scultetus tells us of Johannes Speiserus, a famous preacher of Augs-Burg, in Germany, in the year 1523 who preached the gospel so powerfully, that divers common harlots were converted, and became good Christians, and yet he afterwards turned Papist, and came to a miserable end. *Scultet. Annal p.* 118.

Thus the candle may burn bright to light others in their work, and yet afterwards go out in a stink.

3. It is beyond the power of the greatest gifts to change the heart; a man may preach like an apostle, and pray like an angel, and yet may have the heart of a devil. It is grace only that can change the heart; the greatest gifts cannot change it, but the least grace can. Gifts may make a man a scholar, but grace makes a man a believer.

Now, if gifts cannot change the heart, then a man may have the greatest gifts, and yet be but almost a Christian.

4. Many have gone loaden with gifts to hell; no doubt Judas had great gifts, for he was a preacher of the gospel; and our Lord Jesus

Christ would not set him in the work, and not fit him for the work; yet Judas is gone to his own place. The Scribes and Pharisees were men of great gifts, and yet where is the wise? where is the Scribe? 1 Cor. i. 20. *The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness,* 2 Cor. i. 18

Them that perish; who are they, who? the wise and learned, both among Jews and Greeks, these are called *them that perish. Surgunt indocti et rapiunt cœlum, dum nos cum doctrina nostra in gehennam detrudimur,* said a great Bishop, when he saw a poor Shepherd weeping over a toad. The poor illiterate world attain to heaven, while we with our learning fall into hell.

There are three things must be done for us, if ever we would avoid perishing.

We must be throughly convinced of sin.

We must be really united unto Christ.

We must be instated in the covenant of grace.

Now the greatest gifts cannot stead us in any one of these.

They cannot work through convictions.

They cannot effect our union.

They cannot bring us into covenant-relation.

And consequently they cannot preserve from eternal perishing: And if so, then a man may have the greatest gifts, and yet be but almost a Christian.

5. Gifts may decay and perish; they do not ly beyond the reach of corruption; indeed grace

shall never perish, but gifts will; grace is incorruptible. tho' gifts are not: Grace is a spring whose waters fail not, Isa. lviii. 11. but the streams of gifts may be dried up If grace be corruptible in its own nature, as being but a creature, yet it is incorruptible in regard of its conserver, as being the new creature: He that did create it in us, will conserve it for us: He that did begin it, will also finish it, Heb xii. 2.

Gifts have their root in nature, but grace hath its root in Christ: And therefore though gifts may die and wither, yet grace shall abide for ever.

Now, if gifts are perishing, then (though he that hath the least grace is a Christian, yet) he that hath the greatest gifts, may be but almost a Christian.

Objec. But doth not the apostle bid us covet earnestly the best gifts? 1 Cor xii 31 Why must we covet them, and covet them earnestly, if they avail not to salvation?

Answ Gifts are good, tho' they are not the best good; they are excellent, but there is somewhat more excellent; so it follows in the same verse, *Yet I shew unto you a more excellent way*; and that is the way of grace, one dram of grace is more worth than a talent of gifts. Gifts may make us rich towards man, but it is grace that makes us rich towards God, Luke xii 21

Our gifts profit others, but grace profits ourselves: That whereby I profit another, is good; but that whereby I am profited myself, is better.

Now because gifts are good, therefore we ought to covet them; but because they are not the best good, therefore we ought not to rest in them: We must covet gifts for the good of others, that they may be edified; and we must covet grace, for the good of our own souls, that they may be saved; for whosoever be bettered by our gifts, yet we shall miscarry without grace

3. A man may have a high profession of religion, be much in external duties of godliness, and yet be but almost a Christian: Mat vii 21 *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;* that is, not every one that makes a profession of Christ, shall therefore be owned for a true disciple of Christ: *All are not Israel, that are of Israel,* Rom ix 6 nor are all Christians, that make a profession of religion.

What a goodly profession had Judas? He followed Christ, left all for Christ, he preached the gospel of Christ, he cast out devils in the name of Christ, he ate and drank at the table of Christ, and yet Judas was but an hypocrite.

Most professors are like lilies, fair in show but foul in scent; or like pepper, hot in the mouth, but cold in the stomach. The finest lace may be upon the coarsest cloth.

It is a great deceit to measure the substance of our religion, by the bulk of our profession, and to judge of the strength of our graces, by the length of our duties. The scriptures speak of some, who having a form of godliness, yet deny the power

thereof. 2 Tim iii 5: Deny the power, that is, they do not live in practice of those graces, which they pretend to in their duties: He that pretends to godliness by a specious profession, and yet doth not practice godliness by a holy conversation, he hath a form, but denies the power.

Hugo compares such to the ostrich, *Qui alias habet sed non volat*, which hath great wings, but yet flies not: Many have the wings of a fair profession, but yet use them not to mount upward in spiritual affections, and a heavenly conversation. *Loquitur hic ut Piso, vivit ut Gallonius.*

But to clear the truth of this, that a man may make a high profession of religion, and yet be but almost a Christian, take a four-fold evidence.

1 If a man may profess religion, and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state bettered, then he may be a great professor, and yet be but almost a Christian.

But a man may profess religion, and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state renewed.

He may be a constant hearer of the word, and yet be a sinner still: He may come often to the Lord's table, and yet go away a sinner as he came; we must not think that duties, *ex opere operato*, can confer grace.

Many a soul hath been converted by Christ in an ordinance, but never was any soul converted by an ordinance without Christ

And doth Christ convert all that sit under the ordinance? Surely no; for to some the word is

a favour of death unto death, 2 Cor. ii 16

And also then it is plain, that a man may profess religion, and yet be but almost a Christian.

2. A man may profess religion, and live in a form of godliness, in hypocrisy, Isaiah xlviii 1. *Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah; which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.* What do ye think of these? They make mention of the name of the Lord, there is their profession; but not in truth and righteousness, there is their dissimulation: And indeed there could be no hypocrisy, in a religious sense, were it not for a profession of religion; for he that is wicked, and carnal, and vile inwardly, and appears to be so outwardly, he is no hypocrite, but is what he appears, and appears what he is.

But he that is one thing really, and another thing seemingly, is carnal and unholy, and yet seems to be good and holy, he is an hypocrite. *Hypocrita cupit videri justus.*

Thus the Christian defines hypocrisy to be *simulatio sanctitatis*, a counterfeiting of holiness, *Tolner. instit. Sacred. lib* 8 *c* 9

And to this purpose, the Hebrews have two words for hypocrites, *Panim*, which signifies *Facies* and *Chanephim* which signifies counterfeits, from *Chænaph*, to dissemble; so that he is an hypocrite that dissembles religion, and weareth the face of holiness, and yet is without the grace of

holineſs; he appears to be in ſemblance, what he is not in ſubſtance; he wears a form of godlineſs without, only as a cover of a profane heart within.

He hath a profeſſion, that he may not be thought wicked; but it is but a profeſſion, and therefore he is wicked.

He is the religious hypocrite; religious, becauſe he pretends to it; and yet an hypocrite, becauſe he doth but pretend to it: He is like many men in a conſumption, that have freſh looks, and yet rotten lungs; or like an apple that hath a fair ſkin, but a rotten coar. Many appear righteous, who are only righteous in appearance.

And if ſo, then a man may profeſs religion, and yet be but almoſt a Chriſtian.

3. Cuſtom and faſhion may create a man a profeſſor; as you have many that wear this, or that garb, not becauſe it keeps them warmer, or hath any excellency in it more than another, but merely for faſhion.

Many muſt have powdered hair, ſpotted faces, feathers in their caps, *&c.* for no other end, but becauſe they would be fools in faſhion.

So many profeſs Chriſtianity, not becauſe the means of grace warms the heart, or that they ſee any excellency in the ways of God above the world, but merely to follow the faſhion; I wiſh I might not ſay, it hath been true of our days, becauſe our religion hath been uppermoſt, therefore many have profeſſed it; it hath been the gaining trade, and then moſt would be of that trade.

Religion in credit makes many professors, but few proselytes; but when religion suffers, then its confessors are no more than its converts; for custom makes the former, but conscience the latter.

He that is a professor of religion, merely for custom-sake when it prospers, will never be a martyr for Christ's sake, when religion suffers.

He that owns the truth to live upon that, will disown it, when it comes to live upon him.

They say, that when a house is decaying and falling, all the rats and mice will forsake it; while the house is firm, and they may shelter in the roof, they will stay, but no longer, lest in the decay, the fall should be upon them; and they that lived at top, should ly at the bottom.

My brethren, may I not say, we have many that are the vermine, the rats and mice of religion, that would live under the roof of it, while they might have shelter in it; but when it suffers, forsake it, lest it should fall; and the fall should be upon them? I am persuaded this is not the least reason, why God hath brought the wheel upon the profession of religion, *viz.* to rid it of the vermine.

He shakes the foundation of the house, that these rats and mice may quit the roof; not to overturn it, but to rid them out of it, as the husbandman fans the wheat, that he may get rid of the chaff. The halcion days of the gospel provoke hypocrisy, but the sufferings of religion prove sincerity.

Now then, if cuſtom and faſhion make many men profeſſors, then a man may profeſs religion, and yet be but almoſt a Chriſtian.

4. If many may periſh under a profeſſion of godlineſs, then a man may profeſs religion, and yet be but almoſt a Chriſtian.

Now the Scripture is clear, that a man may periſh under the higheſt profeſſion of religion; Chriſt curſed the fig-tree, that had leaves and no fruit. It is ſaid, Matth. viii. 12. that the children of the kingdom ſhall be caſt out into utter darkneſs. Who were theſe, but they that were then the only people of God in the world by profeſſion, that had made a covenant with him by ſacrifice, and yet theſe caſt out? Pſal. l. 5.

In Matth. vii. 22. you read of ſome that came and made boaſt of their profeſſion to Chriſt, hoping that might ſave them; *Lord*, ſay they, *have we not prophesied in thy name, caſt out devils in thy name, done many wonderful works in thy name?* Now, what ſaith our Lord Chriſt to this? *Then I will profeſs unto them, I never knew you, depart from me*, verſe 23.

Mark, here are them that prophesy in his name, and yet periſh in his wrath; in his name caſt out devils, and then are caſt out themſelves; in his name do many wonderful works, and yet periſh for wicked workers.

The profeſſion of religion will no more keep a man from periſhing, than calling a ſhip, the Safe-guard or the Good-ſpeed, will keep her from

drowning. As many go to heaven with the fear of hell in their hearts, so many go to hell with the name of Christ in their mouths.

Now then, if many may perish under a profession of godliness, then may a man be a high professor of religion, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Object. But it is said by the Lord Christ himself, *He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven*, Mat. x. 32. Now for Christ to say he will confess us before the Father, is equivalent to a promise of eternal life; for if Jesus Christ confess us, God the Father will never disown us.

Solution. True, they that confess Christ, shall be confessed by him: And it is as true, that this confession is equivalent to a promise of salvation. But now you must know, that professing Christ, is not confessing him; for to profess Christ is one thing, to confess Christ is another. Confession is a living testimony for Christ, in a time when religion suffers; profession may be only a lifeless formality, in a time when religion prospers. To confess Christ is to choose his ways, and own them; to profess Christ, is to plead for his ways, and yet live beside them. Profession may be from a feigned love to the ways of Christ, but confession is from a rooted love to the person of Christ.

To profess Christ, is to own him when none deny him: To confess Christ, is to plead for

him, and suffer for him, when others oppose him. Hypocrites may be professors, but the martyrs are the true confessors: Profession is a swiming down the stream; confession is a swiming against the stream. Now, many may swim with the stream, like the dead fish, that cannot swim against the stream, with the living fish: Many may profess Christ, that cannot confess Christ, and, so, notwithstanding their profession, yet are but almost Christians.

4. To come yet nearer: A man may go far in opposing his sin, and yet be but almost a Christian. How, far a man may go in this work I shall show you in seven gradual instances.

1. A man may be convinced of sin, and yet be but almost a Christian. For,

1. Conviction may be rational, as well as spiritual, it may be from a natural conscience enlightned by the word, without the effectual work of the Spirit, applying sin to the heart.

2. Convictions may be worn out; they many times go off, and end not in sound conversion: Saith the church, *We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have brought forth wind*, Isa. vi. 18. This is the complaint of the church, in reference to the unprofitablenes of their affections, and it may be the complaint of most, in reference to the unprofitablenes of their convictions.

3. Many take convictions of sin to be conversions from thence, and so sit down and rest in their conviction. That is a sad complaint

God makes of Ephraim, *Ephraim is an unwise son, for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children*, Hos. xiii. 13. Now, then, if convictions may be only from natural conscience, if they may be worn out, or may be mistaken and rested in for conversion, then a man may have convictions, and be but almost a Christian.

2. A man may mourn for sin, and yet be but almost a Christian: So did Saul; so did Esau, (Heb. xii. 16, 17.) for the loss of the birthright, which was his sin; and therefore he is called by the Spirit of God, *Profane Esau*, yet he sought it again carefully with tears.

Object. But doth not Christ pronounce them blessed that mourn? Matth. v. 4. *Blessed are they that mourn.* Sure then, if a man mourn for sin, he is in a good condition: "You see, "saith Nazianzen, that salvation is joined with "sorrow," *Orat.* 17.

Solution. I answer, It is true, that they who mourn for sin, in the sense Christ there speaks of, are blessed; but all mourning for sin, doth not therefore render us blessed.

1. True mourning for sin, must flow from spiritual conviction of the evil and vileness, and damnable nature of sin.

Now, all that mourn for sin, do not do it from a thorough work of spiritual conviction upon the soul, they have not a right sense of the evil and vileness of sin.

2. True mourning for sin, is more for the

evil that is in sin, than the evil that comes by sin; more because it dishonours God, and wounds Christ, and grieves the Spirit, and makes the soul unlike God, than because it damns the soul.

Now there are many that mourn for sin, not so much for the evil that is in it, as for the evil that it brings with it. There is mourning for sin in hell; you read of weeping and wailing there, Matth. viii. 12. The damned are weeping and mourning to eternity, there is all sorrow, and no comfort: As in heaven there is peace without trouble, joy without mourning; so in hell there is trouble without peace, mourning without joy, weeping and wailing incessantly: but it is for the evil they feel by sin, and not for the evil that is in sin. So that a man may mourn for sin, and yet be but almost a Christian; it may grieve him to think of perishing for sin, when it doth not grieve him that he is defiled and polluted by sin.

3. A man may make a large confession of sin to God, and to others, and yet be but almost a Christian.

How ingenuously doth Saul confess his sin to David! *I have sinned*, saith he: *Thou art more righteous than I: Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly*, 1 Sam. xxiv. 17. 26, 27. So Judas makes a full confession, *I have sinned, in betraying the innocent blood*, Matth. xxvii. 4. Yet Saul and Judas were both rejected of God. So that a man may confess sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Object. But is not confession of sin, a character of a child of God? Doth not the Apostle say, *If we confess our sins, God is just and faithful to forgive them?* 1 John i. 9. No man was ever kept out of heaven for his confessed badness, tho' many are kept out of heaven for their supposed goodness: *Peccatorum confessio Synecdoche universam pœnitentiam hoc loco significat.* Vorst. in loc. Judah, in Hebrew, signifies confession; now Judah got the kingdom from Reuben. Confession of sin is the way to the kingdom of heaven.

Solution. There are some that confess sin, and are saved; there are others that confess sin, and perish.

1. Many confess sin merely out of custom, and not out of conscience: you shall have many that will never pray, but they will make a long confession of sin, and yet never feel the weight or burden of it upon their consciences.

2. Many will confess lesser sins, and yet conceal greater, like the patient in Plutarch, that complained to his physician of his finger, when his liver was rotten.

3. Men will confess sin in the general, or confess themselves sinners, and yet see little, and say less of their particular sins. An implicit confession (as one saith) is almost as bad as implicit faith.

Where confession is right, it will be distinct, especially of those sins that were our chief sins. So David confesses his blood-guiltiness, and

adultery, Psal. li. 4. 14. So Paul his blasphemy, persecution and injury against the saints, 1 Tim. i. 13, 19. It is bad to hear men confess they are great sinners, and yet cannot confess their sins. Tho' the least sin be too bad to be committed, yet there is no sin too bad to be confessed.

4. Many will confess sin, but it is only under extremity, that is not free and voluntary: Pharaoh confesses his sin, but it was when judgment compelled him; *I have sinned against the Lord*, saith he: but it was when he had eight plagues upon him.

Many do with their sins, as mariners do with their goods, cast them out in a storm, wishing for them again in a calm. Confession should come like water out of a spring, which runs freely; not like water out of a still, which is forced by fire.

5. Many confess their sins, but with no intent to forsake sin; they confess the sins they have committed, but do not leave the sins they have confessed.

Many men use confession, as Lewis the eleventh of France did his crucifix; he would swear an oath, and then kiss it; and swear again, and then kiss it again. So, many sin, and then confess they do not well, but yet never strive to do better.

Mr. Torshel tells a story of a minister he knew, that would be often drunk, and when he came into the pulpit, would confess it very lamentingly; and yet no sooner was he out of

the pulpit, but he would be drunk again, and this would he do as constantly as men follow their trades.

Now then, if a man may confess sin merely out of custom; if he may confess lesser sins, and yet conceal greater; if he may confess sin only in the general, or only under extremity; or if he may confess sin without any intent to forsake sin; then surely a man may confess sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

4. A man may forsake sin, and yet be but almost a Christian: He may leave his lusts and wicked ways, which he sometimes lived in: and, in the judgment of the world, become a new man, and yet not be a new creature. Simon Magus, when he hears Philip preaching concerning the kingdom of God, leaves his sorcery and witchcraft and believes, Acts viii. 13.

Object. But you will say, this seems contrary to Scripture; for that saith, *He that confesseth and forsaketh sin, shall have mercy*, Prov. xxviii. 13. But I confess sin, yea, not only so, but I also forsake sin; sure therefore his mercy is my portion, it belongs to me.

It is true, that where the soul forsakes from a right principle, after a right manner, to a right end; where he forsakes sin as sin, as being contrary to God, and the purity of his nature. This declares that soul to be right with God, and the promise shall be made good to it; *He shall find mercy.*

But now, pray mind, there is a forsaking of

sin that is not right, but unsound.

1. Open sins may be deserted, and yet secret sins may be retained. Now this is not a right forsaking, such a soul shall never find mercy. A man may be cured of a wound in his flesh, and yet may die of an imposthume in his bowels.

2. A man may forsake sin, but not as sin. For he that forsakes sin as sin, forsakes all sin. *A quatenus ad omne valet consequentia.* It is impossible for a man to forsake sin as sin, unless he forsake all that he knows to be sin.

3. A man may let one sin go, to hold another the faster: As a man that goes to sea, would willingly save all his goods, but if the storm arise, that he cannot, then he throws some over-board to lighten the vessel, and save the rest: So did they, Acts xxvii. 38.

So the sinner chooses to keep all his sins, but if a storm arise in his conscience, why then he will heave one lust over-board, to save the life of another.

4. A man may let all sin go, and yet be a sinner still; for there is the root of all sin in the heart, tho' the fruit be not seen in the life; the tree lives, tho' the boughs be lopt off.

As a man is a sinner before ever he act sin, so, till grace renew him, he is a sinner, tho' he leaves sin; for there is original sin in him, enough to damn and destroy him, Psal. li. 5.

5. Sin may be left, and yet be loved: A man may forsake the life of sin, and yet retain the love of sin. Now, tho' leaving sin makes him

almost a Christian, yet loving sin vows he is but almost a Christian.

It is less evil to do sin, and not to love it, than to love sin, and not to do it; for to do sin may argue only weakness of grace, but to love sin argues strength of lust: *What I hate, that do I*, Rom. vii. 15.

Sin is bad in any part of a man, but sin in the affection is worse than sin in the conversation; for sin in the conversation may be only from infirmity, but sin in the affection is the fruit of choice and unregeneracy.

6. All sin may be chained, and yet the heart not changed; and so the nature of the sinner is the same as ever. A dog chained up, is a dog still, as much as if he were loose to devour.

There may be a cessation of arms between enemies, and yet the quarrel may remain on foot still. There may be a making truce, where there is no making peace.

A sinner may lay the weapons of sin out of his hand, and yet the enmity against God still remains in his heart.

There may be a truce; he may not sin against him; but there can be no peace till he be united unto him.

Restraining grace holds in the sinner, but it is renewing grace that changes the nature. Now many are held in by grace from being open sinners, that are not renewed by grace, and made true believers.

Now then, if a man may forsake open sins,

and retain secret sins; if he may forsake sin, but not as sin; if he may let one sin go, to hold another the faster; if a man may let all sin go, and yet be a sinner still; if sin may be left, and yet loved; finally, if all sin may be chained, and yet the heart not changed; then a man may forsake sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

5. A man may hate sin, and yet be but almost a Christian. Absalom hated Amnon's uncleanness with his sister Thamar; yea, his hatred was so great, as that he slew him for it, and yet Absalom was but a wicked man.

Object. But the Scripture makes it a sign of a gracious heart to hate sin; yea, tho' a man do, through infirmity fall into sin, yet if he hate it, this is a proof of grace. Paul proves the sincerity of his heart, and the truth of his grace by his hatred of sin, tho' he committed it, Rom. vii. 15. *What I hate, that I do.*

Nay, what is grace but *Conformitas cum architypo*, a conformity of the soul to God; to love as God loves, to hate as God hates: Now God hates sin: It is one part of his holiness, to hate all sin.

Solution. And if I hate sin, then am I conformed to God: and if I am conformed to God, then am I altogether a Christian.

It is true, that there is a hatred of sin, which is a sign of grace, and which flows from a principle of grace, and is grace. As for instance, To hate sin as it is an offence to God,

a wrong to his Majesty; to hate sin as it is a breach of the command, and so a wicked controlling of God's will, which is the only rule of godliness; to hate sin, as being a disingenious transgression of that law of love, established in the blood and death of Christ, and so, in a degree, a crucifying of Christ afresh.

To hate sin, as being a grieving and quenching the Spirit of God, as all sin, in its nature, is. Thus to hate sin, is grace; and thus every true Christian hates sin. But tho' every man that hath grace hates sin, yet every man that hates sin hath not grace: For a man may hate sin from other principles, not as it is a wrong to God, or a wounding Christ, or a grieving the Spirit, for then he would hate all sin; for there is no sin but hath this in the nature of it. But,

1. A man may hate sin for the shame that attends it, more than for the evil that is in it. Some sinners there are, who declare their sins as Sodom, and hide it not, Isa. iii. 9. They are set down in the seat of the scornful, Psalm i. 1. They glory in their shame, Phil. v. 9. But now others there are, who are ashamed of sin, and therefore hate it; not for the sins sake, but the shames sake. This made Absalom hate Amnon's uncleanness, because it brought shame upon him and his sister.

2. A man may hate sin more in others than in himself: So doth the drunkard, he hates drunkenness in another, and yet practises it himself: The liar hates falshood in another,

but likes it in himself. Now he that hates sin from a principle of grace, hates sin most in himself; he hates sin in others, but he loaths most the sins of his own heart.

A man may hate one sin, as being contrary to another: There is a great contrariety between sin and sin, between lust and lust: It is the excellency of the life of grace, that it is an uniform life: There is not one grace contrary to another: The graces of God's Spirit are different, but not differing: Faith, and love, and holiness, are all one; they consist together at the same time, in the same subject; nay, they cannot be parted: There can be no faith without love, no love without holiness. And so on the other hand, no holiness without love, no love without faith. So that this makes the life of grace an easy and excellent life: But now the life of sin is a distracting contradictious life, wherein a man is a servant to contrary lusts. The lust of pride and prodigality is contrary to the lust of covetousness, &c. Tit. iii. 3.

Now when one lust gets to be the master-lust in the soul, then that works a hatred of its contrary: where covetousness gets the heart, there the heart hates pride; and where pride gets uppermost in the heart, there the heart hates covetousness. Thus a man may hate sin, not from a principle of grace, but from the contrariety of lust. He doth not hate any sin as it is sin, but he hates it as being contrary to his beloved sin.

Now then, if a man may hate sin for the shame that attends it; if he may hate sin more in others than in himself; and if he may hate one sin as being contrary to another, then he may hate sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

6. A man may make great vows and promises, he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Thus did Saul, he promises and resolves against his sin: *Return, my son David*, saith he, *for I will no more do thee harm*, 1 Sam. xvi. 21. What promises and resolves did Pharaoh make against that sin of detaining God's people? Saith he, *I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice to the Lord*, Exod. viii. 8. And again, *I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer*, Exod. ix. 28. And yet Saul and Pharaoh both perish in their sins. The greatest purposes and promises against sin, will not make a man a Christian: For,

1. Purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin; we say, Threatned folk live long; and truly so do threatned sins. It is not new purposes, but a new nature, that must help us against sin: Purposes may bring to the birth, but without a new nature, there is no strength to bring forth. The new nature is the best soil for holy purposes to grow in, otherwise they wither and die, like plants in an improper soil.

2. Trouble and afflictions may provoke us to large purposes and promises against sin for the future: What more common than to vow,

and not to pay; to make vows in the day of trouble, which we make no conscience to pay in the day of peace? Many covenant against sin when trouble is on them, and then sin against their covenant, when it is removed from them.

It was a brave rule that Pliny, in one of his Epistles, gave his friend to live by: *Ut tales esse perseveremus sani, quales nos futuros esse profitemur infirmi.* That we should continue to be such when we are well, as we promise to be when we are sick. Many are our sick-bed promises, but we are no sooner well, but we grow sick of our promises.

3. Purposes and resolves against sin for the future, may be only a temptation to put off repentance for the present; Satan may put a man on to good purposes, to keep him from present attempts. He knows, whatever we purpose, yet the strength of performance is not in ourselves. He knows, that purposes for the future, are a-putting God off for the present; they are a secret will not, to a present opportunity. That is a notable passage, Luke ix. 59. *Follow me*, saith Christ to the two men. Now see what answers they give to Christ, *Suffer me first to go and bury my father*, saith one: This man purposes to follow Christ, only he would stay to bury his father. Saith the other, *Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go and bid them farewel which are at my house*, ver. 61. I will follow thee, but only I would first go and take my leave of my friends, or set my

houſe in order: and yet we do not find that ever they followed Chriſt, notwithſtanding their fair purpoſes.

4. Nature unſanctified may be ſo far wrought on, as to make great promiſes and purpoſes againſt ſin.

1. A natural man may have great convictions of ſin, from the workings of an enlightned conſcience.

2. He may approve of the law of God.

3. He may have a deſire to be ſaved.

Now theſe three together, the working of conſcience, the ſight of the goodneſs of the law, a deſire to be ſaved, may bring forth in a man great purpoſes againſt ſin, and yet he may have no heart to perform his own purpoſes. This was much with the caſe of them, Deut. v. 27. ſay they to Moſes, *Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God ſhall ſay, and tell thou it to us, and we will hear it, and do it.* This is a fair promiſe, and ſo God takes it, ver. 28. *I have heard the words of this people, they have well ſaid, all that they have ſpoken.* So ſaid, and ſo done, had been well; but it was better ſaid than done: for tho' they had a tongue to promiſe, yet they had no heart to perform; and this God ſaw, therefore ſaid he, ver. 29. *O that there were ſuch a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them!* They promiſe to fear God, and keep his commandments, but they wanted a new heart to

perform what an unsanctified heart had promised. It fares with men in this case, as it did with that son in the Gospel, that said he would go into the vineyard, but went not, Mat. xxi. 30.

Now then, if purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin; if present afflictions may draw out large promises; if they may be the fruit of temptation, or if from nature unsanctified; surely then a man may promise and purpose much against sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.

7. A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin in himself, and yet be but almost a Christian. So did Balaam, when he went to curse the people of God; he had a great strife within himself, *How shall I curse*, said he, *where God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?* Numb. xxiii. 8.

And did not Pilate strive against his sin, when he said to the Jews, *Shall I crucify your King?—What evil hath he done?—I am innocent of the blood of this man*, Mark xv. 12. 14. Matth. xxvii. 24.

Object. But you will say, Is not this an argument of grace, when there is a striving in the soul against sin? For what should oppose sin in the heart, but grace? The Apostle makes the lusting of the flesh against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, Gal. v. 17. to be an argument of grace in the heart. Now, I find this strife in my heart; tho' the remainders of corruption sometimes break out into actual sins,

yet I find a ſtriving in my ſoul againſt ſin.

Solut. It is true, there is a ſtriving againſt ſin, which is only from grace, and is proper to believers; and there is a ſtriving againſt ſin, which is not from grace, and therefore may be in them that are not believers.

There is a ſtrife againſt ſin in one and the ſame faculty; the will againſt the will, the affection againſt the affection; and this is that which the Apoſtle calls *the luſting of the fleſh againſt the Spirit*; that is, the ſtriving of the unregenerate part againſt the regenerate; and this is ever in the ſame faculty, and is proper to believers only. An unbeliever never finds this ſtrife in himſelf; this ſtrife cannot be in him, it is impoſſible as ſuch; that is, while he is on this ſide a ſtate of grace.

But then, there is a ſtriving againſt ſin in divers faculties, and this is the ſtrife that is in them that are not believers: there the ſtrife is between the will and the conſcience: Conſcience enlightned, and terrified with the fear of hell and damnation, that is againſt ſin; the will and affection, not being renewed, they are for ſin. And this cauſes great tuggings and ſtrong combats many times in the ſinners heart.—*Video meliora proboque deteriora ſequor.*

Thus it was with the Scribes and Phariſees; conſcience convinced them of the divinity of Chriſt, and of the truth of his being the Son of God; and yet a perverſe will and carnal affections cry out, *Crucify him, crucify him.*

Conscience pleadeth for him; he had a witness in their bosoms, and yet their wills were bent against him, and therefore they are said to have resisted the Spirit; *to wit*, the workings and convictions of the Spirit in their consciences, Acts vii. 51. And this is the case of many sinners, when will and affections are for sin, and plead for it, conscience is against it, and many times frights the soul from doing of it.

And hence men take that which opposes sin in them, to be grace, when it is only the work of a natural conscience, they conclude the strife is between grace and sin, the regenerate, and unregenerate part; when alas! it is no other than the contention of a natural conscience against a corrupt will and affection.

And if so, then a man may have great strifes and combat against sin in him, and yet be but almost a Christian.

5. A man may desire grace, and yet be but almost a Christian; so did the five foolish virgins, Matth. xxv. 8. *Give us of your oil:* What was that but true grace? It was the oil that lighted the wise virgins into the bridegroom's chamber. They do not only desire to enter in, but they desire oil to light them in: Wicked men may desire heaven, desire a Christ to save them; there is none so wicked on earth, but desire to be happy in heaven. But now here are they that desire grace as well as glory, and yet these are but almost Christians.

Object. But is it not commonly taught, that

desires of grace are grace? Nay, doth not our Lord Christ himself make it so? *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*, Matth. v. 6.

Solut. It is true, that there are some desires of grace which are grace. As,

1. When a man desires grace from a right sense of his natural state, when he sees the vileness of sin, and the woful, defiled and loathsome condition he is in by reason of sin, and therefore desires the grace of Christ to renew and change him; this is grace. This some make to be the lowest degree of saving faith.

2. When a man joins proportionable endeavours to his desires; doth not only wish for grace, but work for grace; such desires are grace.

3. When a man's desires are constant and incessant, that cease not but in the attainment of their object, such desires are true grace. They are a part of the special work of the Spirit. They do really partake of the nature of grace: Now it is a known maxim, *Quicquid participat de natura tótius, est pars totius:* That which partakes of the nature of the whole, is a part of the whole. The filing of gold is gold. The sea is not more really water than the least drop: The flame is not more really fire than the least spark; for these do *participare de natura totius.* But tho' all the true desires of grace are grace, yet all desires of grace are not true: For,

1. A man may desire grace, but not for itself,

but for somewhat else; nor grace for grace's sake, but for heaven's sake: He doth not desire grace that his nature may be changed, his heart renewed, the image of God stamped upon him, and his lusts subdued in him. These blessed desires are found only in true believers. The true Christian only can desire grace for grace's sake; but the almost Christian may desire grace for heaven's sake.

2. A man may desire grace without proportionable endeavours after grace: Many are good at wishing, but bad at working; like him that lay on the grass on a summer's day, crying out, *O si hoc esse laborare!* O that this were to work! Solomon saith, *The desire of the slothful kill him.* How so? *For his hands refuse to labour*, Prov. xxi. 25. He perisheth in his desires, *Virtutem ut videant contabescantquo relicta.* Pers.

The believer joins desires and endeavours together; *One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after*, Psal. xxvii. 4.

3. A man's desires of grace may be unseasonable; thus the foolish Virgins desired oil when it was too late: *Impli non curant quærere quem tamen desiderant invenire, cupientes consequi, sed non & sequi.* Bern.

The believer's desires are seasonable: He desires grace in the season of grace, and seeks in a time when it may be found. *The wise man's heart knows both time and judgment*, Eccl. viii. 5. He knows his season, and hath wisdom to improve it.

The silly sinner doth all his works out of season: He sins away the seasons of grace, and then desires grace when the season is over: The sinner doth all too late, as Esau desired the blessing when it was too late, and therefore he lost it; whereas had he come sooner, he had obtained it, *Sero sapiunt Phryges.*

Most men are like Epimetheus, wise too late: they come when the market is done; when God hath shut in shop, then they have oil to get. When they ly upon their death-beds, then they desire holy hearts.

4. Desires of grace in many are very inconstant and fleeting, like the morning dew, that quickly passes away, Hosea vi. 4. Or, like Jonah's gourd, that springs up in a night, and withers in a night, Jonah iv. 6, 7. They have no root in the heart, and therefore quickly perish. Now then, if a man may desire grace, but not for grace's sake; if desires may be without endeavours; if a man may desire grace when it is too late; if these desires may be but fleeting and inconstant; then may a man desire grace, and yet be but almost a Christian.

6. A man may tremble at the word of God, and yet be but almost a Christian, as Belshazzar did at the hand-writing upon the wall, Dan. v. 6.

Object. But is not that a note of sincerity, and truth of grace, to tremble at the word? Doth not God say, *To him will I look, that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word,* Isa. lxvi. 2.

Solut. There is a two-fold trembling:

1. One is, when the word discovers the guilt of sin, and the wrath of God that belongs to that guilt; this, where conscience is awake, causes trembling and amazement: Thus when Paul preached of righteousness and judgment, it is said, *Felix trembled*, Acts xxiv. 25.

2. There is a trembling which arises from a holy dread and reverence of the majesty of God speaking in his word: This is only found in true believers, and is that which keeps the soul low in its own eyes. Therefore mark how the words run in Isa. lxvi. 2. *To him will I look, that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*

God doth not make the promises to him that trembles at the word; for the devils believe, and tremble, James ii. 19. The word of God can make the proudest and stoutest sinner in the world to shake and tremble, but it is to the poor and contrite in spirit that trembles: where trembling is the fruit of a spirit broken for sin, and low in its own eyes, there will God look.

Now many tremble at the word, but not from poverty of spirit, not from a heart broken for sin, and low in its own eyes, not from a sense of the majesty and holiness of God, and therefore, notwithstanding they tremble at the word, yet they are but almost Christians.

7. A man may delight in the word and ordinances of God, and yet be but almost a Christ-

tian, Isa. lviii. 2. *They take delight in approaching to God.* And it is said of that ground Matth. xiii. 20. that it received the word with joy, and yet it was but stony ground.

Object. But is it not made a character of a godly man, to delight in the word of God? Doth not David say, he is a blessed man that delights in the law of the Lord? Psal. i. 2.

Solut. There is a delighting in the word, which flows from grace, and is a proof of blessedness.

1. He that delights in the word, because it is spiritual, he is a Christian indeed: The more spiritual the ordinances are, the more doth a gracious heart delight in them.

2. When the word comes close to the conscience, rips up the heart, and discovers sin, and yet the soul delights in it notwithstanding; this is a sign of grace.

3. When delight arises from that communion that is to be had with God there, this is from a principle of grace in the soul.

But there may be a delight in the word, where there is no grace.

1. There are many who delight in the word because of the eloquence of the preacher; they delight not so much in the truths delivered, as in the dress they are delivered in. Thus it is said of the prophet Ezekiel, that he was to them as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, Ezek. xxxiii. 52.

2. There are very many who delight to hear the word, that yet take no delight to do it: so saith God of them in Ezek xxxiii 32 *They delight to hear my words, but they do them not.*

Now then, if a man may delight in the word, more because of the eloquence of the preacher, than because of the spiritualness of the matter: If he may delight to hear the word, and yet not delight to do it, then he may delight in the word, and yet be but almost a Christian.

8 A man may be a member of the church of Christ, he may join himself to the people of God, partake with them in all ordinances, and share of all church-privileges, and yet be but almost a Christian.

So the five foolish virgins joined themselves to the wise, and walked together.

Many may be members of the church of Christ, and yet not members of Christ, the Head of the church.

There was a mixed multitude came up with the church of Israel out of Egypt; they joined themselves to the Israelites, owned their God, left their own country, and yet in heart Egyptians notwithstanding.

All are not Israel, that are of Israel, Rom ix 6

The church in all ages hath had unsound members: Cain had communion with Abel; Ishmael dwelt in the same house with Isaac; Judas was in fellowship with the apostles; and so was Demas with the rest of the disciples.

There will be some bran in the finest meal.

the draw-net of the gospel, catches bad Fishes as well as good; the tares and the wheat grow together, and it will be so till the harvest.

God hath a church where there are no members, but such as are true members of Christ; but it is in heaven; it is the church of the first-born, Heb xii 23 there are no hypocrites, no rotten, unsound professor, none but the spirits of just men made perfect, Matth iii 18 All is pure wheat that God layeth up in that garner; there the chaff is separated to unquenchable fire.

But in the church on earth the wheat and the chaff ly in the same heap together: The Samaritans will be near of kin to the Jews, when they are in prosperity; for while the church of God flourisheth in the world, many will join to it, they will seem Jews, tho' they are Samaritans; and seem saints, tho' yet they are no better than almost Christians.

9. A man may have great hopes of heaven, great hopes of being saved, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Indeed there is a hope of heaven, which is the anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, Heb vi 19 it never miscarries, and it is known by four properties.

First, It is a hope which purifies the heart, purges out sin, 1 John iii 3 *He that hath this hope, purifieth himself even as God is pure.* That soul that truly hopes to enjoy God, truly endeavours to be like God.

Secondly, It is a hope which fills the heart with gladness: *We rejoice in hope of the glory of God,*

Rom v 2

Thirdly, It is a hope that is founded upon the promise, Psal cxxx 6 As there can be no true faith without a promise, so not any true hope. Faith applies the promise, and hope expects the fulfilling of the promise. Faith relies upon the truth of it, and hope waits for the good of it. Faith gives interest, hope expects livery and seisin.

Fourthly, It is a hope that is wrought by God himself in the soul, who is therefore called, *The God of hope,* Rom xv 13. as being the author as well as the object of hope. Now he that hath this hope, shall never miscarry: This is a right hope, the hope of the true believer, *Christ in you the hope of glory,* Col i 27

But then, as there is a true and sound hope, so there is a false and rotten hope; and this is much more common, as bastard-pearls are more frequently worn than true pearls.

There is nothing more common than to see men big with groundless hopes of heaven: As, *First,* A man may have great hope, that hath no grace; you read of the hope of hypocrites, Job xviii 13, 14.

The performance of duties is a proof of their hope: The foolish virgins would never have done what they did, had they thought they should have been shut out after all.

Many professors would not be at such pains in duties as they are, if they did not hope for heaven. Hope is the great motive to action; despair

cuts the sinews of all endeavours; this is one reason why the damned in hell, cease acting toward an alteration of their state, because despair hath taken hold of them: If there were any hope in hell, they would up and be doing there. So that there may be great hopes, where there is no grace Experience proves this; formal professors are men of no grace, but yet men of great hopes; nay, many times you shall find, that none fear more about their eternal condition, than they that have most cause of joy; and none hope more, than they that have most cause of fear. As interest in God may sometimes be without hope, so hope in God may be without interest.

2. A man may hope in the mercy, and goodness, and power of God without eyeing the promise; and this is the hope of most. God is full of mercy and goodness, and therefore willing to save; and he is infinite in power, and therefore able to save; why therefore should I not rest on him?

Now, it is presumption, and therefore sin, to hope in the mercy of God, otherwise than by eyeing the promise; for the promise is the channel of mercy, the pipe thro' which it is conveyed: All the blessedness the saints enjoy in heaven, is no other than what is the fruit of the promise relyed on, and hoped for there on earth. A man hath no warrant to hope in God, but by virtue of the promise.

3. A man may hope for heaven, and yet not cleanse his heart, nor depart from his secret sins:

That hope of salvation that is not accompanied with heart-purification, that is a vain hope

4 A man may hope for heaven, and yet be doing the work of hell: He may hope for salvation, and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences. This is the case of many, *Malè agendo sperant, et sperando pereunt*: like the water-man, that looks one way and rows another. Many have their eyes on heaven, whole hearts are in the earth; they hope in God, but choose him not for a portion; they hope in God, but do not love him as the best good, and therefore are like to have no portion in him, nor good by him; but are like to perish without him, notwithstanding all their hopes, Job xxvii 8. *What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God takes away his soul?*

Now then, if a man may have great hopes of heaven, that hath no grace; if he may hope in mercy without eying the promise; if he may hope without heart purifying; if he may hope for heaven, and yet do the work of hell; surely then, a man may have great hopes of heaven, and yet be but almost a Christian.

10. A man may be under great and visible changes, and these wrought by the ministry of the word, and yet be but almost a Christian, as Herod was; it is said, when he heard John the Baptist, he did many things, and heard him gladly, Matth vi 20 Saul was under a great change, when he met the Lord's prophets, he turned prophet too.

Nay, it is said, 1 Sam. x. 9. *that God gave him another heart.*

Now, was not this a work of grace? And was not Saul here truly converted? One would think he was, but indeed he was not.

For tho' it is said, God gave him another yet it is not said, that God gave him a new heart.

There is a great difference between LEBB ACHER another heart, and LEBB CHADISH a new heart; God gave him another heart to fit him for a ruler, but gave him not a new heart to make him a believer. Another heart may make another man; but it is a new heart that makes a new man.

Again, Simon Magus is a great proof of this truth, he was under a great and visible change; of a sorcerer, he was turned to a believer; he left his witch-crafts and sorceries, and embraced the gospel; was not this a great change?

If the drunkard doth but leave his drunkenness, the swearer his oaths, the profane person his profaneness; they think this a gracious change and their state is now good: Alas! Simon Magus did not only leave his sins, but had a kind of conversion; for, *he believed, and was baptized*, Acts viii. 13.

Objec. But is not that man that is changed, a true Christian?

Solution. Not every change makes a man a Christian: Indeed there is a change, that whoever is under it, he is a true Christian.

When a man's heart is so changed, as that it is renewed when old things are done away, and all things is become new, 2 Cor v. 17. when the new creature is wrought in the soul, when a man is turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, Acts xxvi. 18. When the mind is enlightned, the will renewed, the affections made heavenly, then a man is a Christian indeed.

But now you must know, that every change is not this change: For,

1. There is a civil change, a moral change, as as well as a spiritual and supernatural change.

Many men are changed in a moral sense; and one may say, they are become new men, but they are in heart and nature the same men still. They are not changed in a spiritual and supernatural sense, and therefore it cannot be said of them, they are become new creatures.

Restraining grace may cause a moral change, but it is renewing grace that must cause a saving change. Now many are under restraining grace, and so changed morally, that are not under the power of renewing grace, and so changed savingly.

2. There is an outward change, as well as an inward change; the outward change is often without the inward, tho' the inward change is never without the outward. A man's heart cannot be sanctified, but it will influence the life; but a man's life may be reformed, and yet never affect or influence the heart.

3 A man may be converted from a course of profaneness, to a form of godliness; from a filthy conversation, to a fair profession; and yet the heart the same, in one and the other. A rotten post may be gilt without, and yet unsound within. *Hypocrita in verbis sanctus, in corde vanus, intus Nero foras Cato. Audi, nemo melius; specta, nemo pejus.*

It is common to have the out-side of the cup and platter made clean, and yet the in-side foul and filthy, Mat. xxiii. 25.

Now then, if a man may be changed morally, and yet not spiritually; outwardly, and yet not inwardly; from a course of profaneness, to a lifeless form of godliness, then a man may be under great and visible changes, and yet be no more than almost a Christian.

I do not speak this to discountenance any change, short of that that is spiritual; but to awaken you to seek after that change, which is more than moral. It is good to be outwardly reformed, but it is better to be savingly renewed.

I know how natural it is for men to take up with any thing like a work of conversion, tho' it be not conversion; and resting in that, they eternally perish.

Beloved, let me tell you, there is no change, no conversion can stead your souls in the day of judgment, on this side that saving work, which is wrought on the soul by the Spirit of God renewing you throughout, 1 Thess. v. 23. The

sober man without this change shall as surely go to hell as the beastly Drunkard.

Morality and civility may commend us to men, but not to God; they are of no value in the procurement of an eternal salvation.

A man may go far in outward change, and yet not be one step nearer heaven, than he that never was under any change; nay, he may be (in some sense) farther off, as Christ saith: The Scribes and Pharisees were farther from heaven with all their show of godliness, than publicans or harlots, in all their sin and uncleanness, Mat. xxi. 31. Because resting in a false work, a partial change, we neglect to seek after a true and saving change. There is nothing more common than to mistake our state, and by overweaning thoughts mis-judge our condition, and so perish in our own delusions.

The world is full of these foolish builders, that lay the foundation of their hopes of eternal salvation upon the sand, Matth. vii. 26.

Now, my brethren, would you not mistake the way to heaven, and perish in delusion? Would you not be found fools at last? For none are such fools as the spiritual fool, who is a fool in the great business of salvation. Would you not be fools for your souls, and for eternity? O then, labour after and pray for a thorough work of conversion, beg of God that he would make a saving change in your souls, that you may be altogether Christians. All other changes below this saving change, this heart-change, make us

but almost Christians.

11. A man may be zealous in the matters of religion, and yet be but almost a Christian. Jehu did not only serve God, and do what he commanded him, but was very zealous in his service, 2 Kings x. 16. *Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord of hosts:* and yet in all this, Jehu was a very hypocrite, 2 Chron. xxix. Joash was a great reformer in Jehoiadah's time; it is said, *He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiadah the priest:* but when Jehoiadah died, Joash his zeal for God died with him, and he becomes a very wretch.

Objec. But the apostle makes zeal to be a note of sound Christianity, Gal. iv. 18. *It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing?* Nay, it seems to be the non-such qualification for obtaining eternal life. *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force,* Matth. xi. 12.

It is true, there is a zeal which is good, and which renders the soul highly acceptable to God; a zeal that never misses of heaven and salvation.

Now this is a zeal which is a celestial fire, the true temper and heat of all the affections to God and Christ, *Qui non zelat, non amat.* It is a zeal wrought and kindled in the soul, by the Spirit of God, who first knows it, and then sets it on work; it is a zeal that hath the word of God for its guide, directing it in working, both in regard of its object and end, manner and measure. It is a zeal that checks sin, and forwards the

heavenly life; it is a zeal that makes the glory of God its chief end, which swallows up all by ends; *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*, John ii. 17.

But now all zeal is not this kind of zeal; there is a false zeal as well as a true; every grace hath its counterfeit: As there is fire, which is true heavenly fire on the altar; so there is strange fire, *Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire upon God's altar*, Lev. x 1.

There are several kinds of zeal, none of which are true and sound, but false and counterfeit.

I will instance in eight particulars,

1. There is a blind zeal, a zeal without knowledge, Rom. x. 2. *They have a zeal*, saith the apostle, *but not according to knowledge*. Now as knowledge without zeal is fruitless, so zeal without knowledge is dangerous; it is like wild-fire in the hand of a fool, or like the devil in the man possessed, that threw him sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water, Mat. xvii. 5. *Zelus absque scientia, quo vehementius irruit, eo gravius corruit.* Bern.

The eye is the light of the body, and the understanding is the light of the soul: Now as the body without the light of the eye, cannot go without stumbling; so the soul without the light of the mind, cannot act without erring.

Zeal without knowledge, is like an *ignis fatuus*, in a dark night, that leads a traveller out of his way into the boggs and myre. This was the zeal of Paul, Acts xxii. 3, 4. while he was a

Pharisee, *I was zealous towards God, as ye all are this Day; and I persecuted this way unto Death.* And so Acts xxvi. 9 *I verily thought with myself, I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.* So Philip. iii. 6. *Concerning zeal, persecuting the church.*

Such a zeal was that in John xvi. 2. *They shall put you out of the synagogue;* (silence you you shall not be suffered to preach) *yea, the time comes, that whoever kills you, will think that he doth God service.* This is great zeal, but yet it is a blind zeal, and that God abhors.

2. There is a partial zeal, in one thing fire-hot, in another key-cold; zealous in this thing, and yet careless in another: Many are first table Christians, zealous in the duties of the first-table, and yet neglect the second: Thus the Pharisees were zealous in their corban, Mat xxiii. 23. and yet unnatural to their parents, suffering them to starve and perish. Lyra hath these words, *Filius per professionem sanctam, in religione excusatur survienio parentibus.* Others are second-table Christians, zealous in the duties of the second table, but neglect the first; more for righteousness among men, than for holiness towards God. But now he whose religion ends with the first table, or begins with the second, he is a fool in his profession, for he is but almost a Christian.

The woman that was for the dividing the child, was not the true mother; and he that is for dividing the commands, is not a true believer.

Jehu was zealous against Ahab's house, but not so against Jeroboam's calves, 2 Kings x. 10. compared with verse 29. Many are zealous against sins of opinion, that yet use no zeal against the sins of their conversation.

Now, as we know that the sweat of the whole body is a sign of health, but the sweat of some one part only, shows a distemper; and therefore physicians do reckon such an heat to be symptomatical. *Joan. Fern. de febribus, lib. 4. cap.* 19. So, where zeal reaches to every command of God alike, that is a sign of a sound constitution of soul: but where it is partial, where a man is hot in one part, and cold in another, that is symptomatical of some inward spiritual distemper.

3. There is a misplaced zeal, fixed upon unsuitable and disproportionable objects, many are very zealous in trifling things that are not worth it, and trifle in the things that most require it; like the Pharisees, that were diligent tythers of mint, annise, and cummin, but neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith, Matth. xxiii. 23. They had no zeal for these, tho' very hot for the other. Many are more zealous for a ceremony than for the substance of religion; more zealous for bowing at the name of Jesus, than for conformity to the life of Jesus; more zealous for a holy vestment, than for a holy life; more zealous for the inventions of men, than for the institutions of Christ. Heathens will rise up

in judgment against such men: *Deus non superstitione coli vult sed pietate*, said Cicero.

This is a superstitious zeal, and usually found in men unconverted, whom grace never was wrought in. When was it that Paul was so exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers? as he saith, Gal. i. 14. but only when he was in his wretched and unconverted state; as you may see in the next verses; *But when it pleased God to call me by his grace, then I conferred not with flesh and blood*, ver. 15, 16. Paul had another kind of zeal then, acted by other kind of principles.

4. There is a selfish zeal, that hath a man's own ends for its motive; Jehu was very zealous, but it was not so much for God, as for the kingdom; not so much in obedience to the command, as in design to step into the throne: and therefore God threatens to punish him for that very thing he commands him to do, Hos. i. 4. *I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.* Because he shed that blood to gratify his lust, not to obey God. So Simeon and Levi pretended great zeal for circumcision, seem very zealous for the honour of God's ordinances, when in truth their zeal was for covetousness, and revenge upon the Shechemites, Gen. xxxiv. 14. 15. comp. with ver. 25, &c.

5. There is an out-side zeal; such was that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they would not eat with unwashen hands, but yet would live in unseen sins: they would wash the cup often,

but the heart seldom: paint the out-side, but neglect the in-side. Jehu was a mighty out-side reformer, 2 Kings x. 16. but he reformed nothing within, for he had a base heart under all, ver. 31. *Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart.* Tho' his fleece was fair, his liver was rotten: *Ne apparet quisquam ultra videri quem esse ut possit ultra esse quam videtur.* Greg.

Our Lord Christ observes of the Pharisees, *They pray to be seen of men*, and fast so, *that they may appear to men to fast*, Matth. vi. 5, 6.

6. There is a foreign-sick zeal, that runs out upon others, like the candle in the lanthren, that sends all the heat out at the top; or as the lewd woman Solomon mentions, whose feet abide not in her own house, Prov. vii. 11.

Many are hot and high against the sins of others, and yet cannot see the same in themselves, like the Lamia, who put on their spectacles when they went abroad, but pulled them off within doors.

It is easy to see faults in others, and as hard to see them in ourselves. Jehu was zealous against Baal and his priests, because that was Ahab's sin; but not against the calves of Bethel, because that was his own sin. This zeal is the true character of an hypocrite: his own garden is over-run with weeds, while he is busy in looking over his neighbour's pale.

7. There is a sinful zeal: all the former may

be called ſinful from ſome defect; but this I call ſinful, a more ſpecial notion, becauſe againſt the life and chief of religion; it is a zeal againſt zeal, that flies not at profaneneſs, but at the very power of godlineſs; not at error, but at truth; and is moſt hot againſt the moſt ſpiritual and important truths of the times. Whence elſe are the ſufferings of men for the truth, but from this ſpirit of zeal againſt truth? This may be called a deviliſh zeal: for as there is the faith of the devils, ſo there is the zeal of devils: therefore his rage is great, becauſe he knows his time is ſhort, James ii. 19. Rev. xii. 2.

8. There is ſcriptureleſs zeal, that is not butted and bounded by the word, but by ſome baſe and low ends; ſuch was Saul's zeal, when God bids him deſtroy Amalek, and ſpare neither man nor beaſt, 1 Sam. xv. 3. and then contrary to God's command, he ſpares the beſt of the ſheep and oxen, under pretence of zeal for God's ſacrifice. Another time, when he had no ſuch command, then he ſlays the Gibeonites, in zeal to the children of Iſrael and Judah, 2 Sam. xxi. 2. Many a man's zeal is greater then and there, when and where he hath the leaſt warrant from God. The true ſpirit of zeal is bounded by Scripture; for it is for God, and the concernments of his glory. God hath no glory from that zeal that hath no Scripture-warrant.

Now then, if the zeal of a man in the things of God, may be only a blind zeal, or a partial

zeal, or a misplaced zeal, or a selfish zeal, or an outside zeal, or a foreign-sick zeal, or a sinful zeal, or a scriptureless zeal, then it is evident, that a man may be very zealous in the matters of religion, and yet be but almost a Christian.

12. A man may be much in prayer, he may cry often, and pray much, and yet be but almost a Christian. So did the Pharisees, whom yet our Lord Christ rejects for hypocrites, Matth. xii. 13.

Object. But is not a praying frame an argument of a sincere heart? Are not the saints of God called, *The generation of them that seek the face of God*? Psal. xxiv. 6.

Solut. A man is not therefore a Christian, because he is much in prayer. I grant, that those prayers that are from the workings and sighings of God's Spirit in us, from sincere hearts lifted up to God, from a sense of our own emptiness, and God's infinite fulness; that are suited to God's will, the great rule of prayer; that are for spiritual things more than temporal; that are accompanied with faith and dependence; such prayers speak a man altogether a Christian.

But now a man may be much in prayer, and yet be a stranger to such prayer: As,

1. Nature may put a man upon prayer, for it is a part of natural worship: it may put a child of God upon prayer; so it did Christ, Matth. xxvi. 39. 42. *He went and fell on his*

face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. This was a prayer of Christ, which flowed from the sinless strugglings of nature, seeking its own preservation.

2. A man may pray in pretence for a covering to some sin; so did those devout Pharisees, Matth. xxiii. 14. *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you devour widows houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.* So the Papists seem very devout to pray a rich man's soul out of purgatory, but it is to cheat the heir of much of his estate, under pretence of praying for his Father's soul.

3. A man may pray, and yet love sin, as Augustine before conversion, prayed against his sin, but was afraid God should hear him, and take him at his word: Now God hears not such prayers, Psal. lxvi. 18. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayer.*

4. A man may pray much for temporal things, and little for spiritual things; and such are the prayer of most men, crying out most for temporal things: More for, *Who will shew us any good?* Psal. iv. 6. than for, *Lord lift upon us the light of thy countenance.* David copies out the prayer of such, Psal. cxliv. 12, &c. *That our sons may be as plants, and that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: That our garners may be full,* &c. *Happy is the people that is in such*

a case. This is the carnal hearts prayer; and this David calls vanity, ver. 11. *They are strange children, whose mouth speak vanity.*

5. A man may pray, and yet be far from God in prayer: *This people draw near to me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me,* Isa. xxix. 13. Matth. xv. 8. A man may pray, and yet have no heart in prayer; and that God chiefly looks at; *My Son, give me thy heart,* Prov. xxiii. 26.

The Jews have this sentence written on the walls of their synagogues, "Prayer without the "intention of the mind, is but a body without "a soul." It is not enough to be conscionable to use prayer, but we must be conscionable in the use of prayer. Many are so conscientious, that they dare not but pray; and yet so irreligious, that they have no heart in prayer: A common work of God may make a man conscionable to do duties, but nothing less than saving grace in the heart will make a man conscionable in the doing of them.

6. A man's prayer may be a lie; as a profession without sanctity is a lie to the word; so prayer without sincerity is a lie to God. It is said of Israel, that they sought God, and enquired early after him, Psal. lxxviii. 34. They were much in prayer, and God calls all but a lie: *Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongues, for their heart was not with him,* verse 36, 37. *Hearken to my prayer, that go-*

eth not out of feigned lips, saith David, Psalm xvii. 1.

7. Afflictions and the pressures of outward evils, will make a man to pray, and pray much, Psal. lxxviii. 14. *When he slew them, then they sought him; and returned and enquired early after God. Neuter me amici cujusdam languor admonuit optimes esse nondum infirmi simus*, Plin. Ep. 16. lib. 7. The Heathen mariners call every man upon his God, when in a storm; when they fear drowning, then they fall to praying, Jonah i. 5. Mariners are, for the most part, none of the devoutest, nor much addicted to prayer; they will swear twice, where they pray once; and yet it is said, *They cry to the Lord in their trouble*, Psal. cvii. 23. 28. And hence you have a proverb, "He that can-"not pray let him go to sea:" *Qui nescit orare, discat navigare. They poured out a prayer, when thy chastning was upon them*, Isa. xxvi. 16.

Now then, if nature may put a man upon prayer; if a man may pray in pretence and design; if a man may pray, and yet love sin; if a man may pray mostly for temporal things; if a man may pray, and yet be far from God in prayer; if prayer may be a lie; or if it may be only the cry of the soul under affliction; sure then, a man may be much in prayer, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Object. But suppose a man pray, and prevail with God in prayer, surely that is a witness from heaven of that man's sincerity in prayer?

Now, I pray, and prevail; I ask, and am answered.

Solut. A man may pray, and be answered; for God many times answers prayers in judgment: as God is sometimes silent in mercy, so he speaks in wrath: and as he sometimes denies prayer in mercy, so he sometimes answers in judgment. When men are over importunate in some things their lusts are upon, and will take no nay, then God answers in judgment, Psal. lxxviii. 29. *He gave them their own desire.* They had desired quails, and God sends them; but now mark the judgment, ver. 30, 31. *While the meat was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew them.*

Object. Ay, but suppose a man's affections are much stirred in prayer, how then? Is not that a true note of Christianity? Now my affections are much stirred in prayer.

Solut. So was Esau, when he sought the blessing; *He sought it carefully with tears,* Heb. xii. 17. A man may be affected with his own parts in a duty, while good notions pass thro' his head, and good words thro' his lips; some good motions also may stir in his heart, but they are but sparks which fly out at the tunnel of the chimney, which suddenly vanish. So that it is possible a man may pray, and prevail in prayer; pray, and be affected in prayer, and yet be but almost a Christian.

13. A man may suffer for Christ in his goods, in his name, in his person, and yet be but al-

most a Christian.

Every man that bears Christ's cross on his shoulders, doth not therefore bear Christ's image in his soul.

Object. But doth not our Lord Christ make great promises to them that suffer, or lose any thing for him? Doth not he say, Matth. xix. 29. *Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my names sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life?* Sure they are true Christians whom Christ makes this promise to.

Solut. There is a suffering for Christ, that is a note of sincerity, and shall have its reward.

That is, when a man suffers for a good cause, Matth. v. 10, 11, 12. upon a good call, and with a good conscience, for Christ's sake and in Christ's strength; when his sufferings are a filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, Col. i. 24. When a man suffers as a Christian, as the apostle hath it, 1 Pet. iv. 6. *If a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.* When a man thrusts not himself into sufferings, but stays God's call, such sufferings is a proof of integrity, Mark xiv. 28, 29.

But now every suffering for Christ, is not suffering as a Christian: For,

1. A man may suffer for Christ, for that profession of religion that is upon him: the world hates the show of religion; times may come, that it may cost a man as dear to wear

the livery of Christ, as to wear Christ himself. Alexander had like to have lost his life for the gospels sake, Acts xix. 33. yet he was that Alexander (as is generally judged) that afterward made shipwreck of faith, and greatly opposed Paul's ministry, 1 Tim. i. 20. iv. 14.

2. A man may suffer for Christ, and yet have no true love to Christ. This is supposed in 1 Cor. xiii. 3. *Tho' I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

Love to Christ is the only noble ground of suffering; but a man may suffer much upon other ends.

1. Out of opinion of meriting by our suffering, as the Papists. Or,

2. Out of vain-glory, or for applause among professors, some have died that their names might live. Or,

3. Out of a Roman resolution, or stoutness of spirit. *Vicit amor latriæ laudisque immensa cupido.*

4. Out of a design of profit, as Judas forsook all for Christ, hoping to mend his market by closing with him. Or,

4. Rather to maintain an opinion, than for truths propagation. Socrates died for maintaining that there was but one God; but whether he died rather for his own opinion, than for God's sake, I think it is no hard matter to determine. Thus a man may suffer for professing Christ, and yet suffer upon wrong principles.

Now then, if a man may suffer for Christ, from the profession that is upon him; or suffer for Christ, and yet not truly love him; then a man may suffer for Christ, and yet be but almost a Christian.

14. A man may be called of God, and embrace this Call, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Judas is a famous instance of this truth; he was called by Christ himself, and came at the call of Christ, and yet Judas was but almost a Christian.

Object. But is not the being under the call of God, a proof of our interest in the predestinating love of God? Doth not the Apostle say, *Whom he predestinated, them he called?* Rom. viii. 30. Nay, doth he not say in the same verse, *Whom he called, them he justified?* Nay, doth not God call all whom he intends to save?

Solut. Tho' God calleth all those that shall be saved, yet all shall not be saved whom God calleth. Every man under the gospel is called by God in one sense or other; but yet every man under the gospel shall not therefore be saved; *For many are called, but few are chosen*, Matth. xx. 16 There is a two-fold call of God, internal and external.

1. There is an internal call of God. Now this call is a special work of the Spirit by the ministry of the word, whereby a man is brought out of a state of nature into a state of grace; out of darkness into light; from being vessels

of wrath, to be made heirs of life, Acts xxvi 18.

I grant, that whoever is under this call of God, is called effectually and savingly, called to be a Christian indeed: "Every man that hath heard "and learned of the Father, cometh to me," John vi. 45

2. There is a call of God, which a man may have, and yet not be this call; there is an external call of God, which is by the ministry of the word.

Now every man that lives under the preaching of the gospel, is thus called: God calls every soul of you to repent, and lay a sure foundation for heaven and salvation, by the word you hear this day, Mat. xxii. 9.

But now, every man that is thus [illegible] called, is not therefore a Christian [illegible]

1. M[illegible] r or, [illegible] many under the call of God, come to Christ. but are not converted to Christ, have n[illegible] the grace and life of Christ. [illegible] nothing of xxii. who when [illegible] as he, Matth. bid guests [illegible] Christ sent out his servants to [illegible] unto the marriage, came in at the call of Christ, but yet had not on the wedding-garment, ver. 11. that is, had none of the grace and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

2. Many that are under the call of the gospel come to Christ, and yet afterwards fall away from Christ, as Judas and Demas did, 2 Tim. iv. 10. It is said, when Christ preached a doctrine which his disciples did not like, that, "from that time "many of his disciples went back, and walked "no more with him," John vi. 66.

Now then, if many are under this external call of God only; if many that come to Christ are not converted to Christ, but fall away from Christ; then a man may be called of God, and yet be but almost a Christian.

15 A man may have the Spirit of God, and yet be but almost a Christian. Balaam had the Spirit of God given him when he blessed Israel, Num. xxiv 2. "Balaam saw Israel abiding in "tents, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon "him." Judas had, for by the Spirit he casts out devils. He was one of them that came to Christ, and said, "Lord, even the devils are "subject to us." Saul had, 1 Sam. x. 10. "Behold a company of prophets met him; and "the Spirit of God came upon him, and he pro-"phesied among them."

Objec. But you will say, Can a man have the Spirit of God, and yet not be a Christian? Indeed the scripture saith, "If any man have not "the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," Rom. viii. 9. But surely, if any man have the Spirit of Christ, he is his.

Solut. There is a having of the Spirit, which is a sure mark of saintship. Where the Spirit is an effectual prevailing principle of grace and sanctification, renewing and regenerating the heart. Where the Spirit is as a potent worker, helping the soul's infirmities, Rom. viii. 26. Where the Spirit is so, as to abide for ever, John xiv. 16. But now every man that hath the Spirit, hath not the Spirit in this manner. For,

1. A man may have the Spirit only transiently, not abidingly: The Spirit may be in a man, and yet not dwell in a man: The Spirit is wherever he dwells; but he doth not dwell wherever he is: He is in all, but dwells in saints only; he is in all, *per divinitatis presentiam*, Lumb. se. 1. sent. dist. 17. but dwells in saints only, *per inhabitationis gratiam:* the hypocrite may have the Spirit for a season, but not to abide in him for ever.

2. A man may have the Spirit, and yet not be born of the Spirit, John iii. 4, 5 Every true Christian is born of the Spirit; an hypocrite may have the gifts of the Spirit, but not the graces; the Spirit may be in him by way of illumination, but not by way of sanctification; by way of conviction, but not by way of conversion; tho' he may have such common grace for the good of others, yet he may have no special grace for the good of himself; tho' his profession be spiritual, yet his state and condition is carnal.

3. A man may have the Spirit only as a spirit of bondage; thus many have the Spirit working only to bondage: The Spirit of bondage is an operation of the Holy Ghost by the law, convincing the conscience of sin, and of the curse of the law, and working in the soul such an apprehension of the wrath of God, as makes thoughts of God a terror to him

This Spirit may be, and often is, without saving grace. This operation of the Spirit was in Cain and Judas.

Thó' none that receive the Spirit of adoption, but they first receive the Spirit of bondage; yet many receive the Spirit of bondage, that never receive the Spirit of adoption.

4. A man may have the Spirit of God working in him, and yet it may be resisted by him. It is said of the Jews, Isa lxiii. 10 *They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit:* and the same sin is charged upon their children, Acts vii 51. "Ye stiff-"necked, and uncircumcised in heart, ye have "always resisted the Holy Ghost; as your fathers "did, so do ye" The hypocrite retains not the Spirit, so long as it comes up to regeneration and adoption; but quenches the motions of it, and thereby miscarries eternally.

5 A man may have the Spirit, and yet sin that unpardonable sin; he may have the Holy Ghost, and yet sin that sin against the Holy Ghost; nay, no man can sin this sin against it, but he that hath some degree of it.

The true believer hath so much of the Spirit, such a work of it in him, that he cannot sin that sin; *He that is born of God, sins not;* viz *that sin unto death;* for that is meant, 1 John vii. 16, 17, 18. The carnal professed sinner, he cannot sin that sin, because he is carnal and sensual, having not the Spirit, Jude 19. A man must have some measure of the Spirit, that sins this sin; so hath the hypocrite, he is said to be partaker of the Holy Ghost, Heb. vi. 4. and he only is capable of sinning the sin against the Holy Ghost.

Now then, if a man may have the Spirit tran-

siently only, not abidingly; if a man may have the Spirit, and yet not be born of the Spirit; if he may have the Spirit, only as a Spirit of bondage; if a man may have the Spirit working in him, and yet it may be resisted by him; if a man may have the Spirit, and yet sin that unpardonable sin against it; then surely a man may have the Spirit of God, and yet be but almost a Christian.

16. A man may have faith, and yet be but almost a Christian. Luke viii. 15. The stony-ground hearers (that is, these hearers set out by the stony-ground) for a while believed. It is said, John i. 23. That many believed in the name of Christ, yet Christ durst not commit himself to them. *Fides minime fides, quippe ex miraculis nota*, tho' they trusted in Christ, yet Christ would not trust them; and why? *Because he knew all men*, ver. 24. He knew they were rotten at the root, notwithstanding their faith. A man may have all faith, even to remove mountains, and yet nothing, 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

Object. But how can this be, that a man may have faith, and yet be but almost a Christian? Doth not our Lord Christ promise life eternal, and salvation to all that believe? Is not this the gospel that is to be preached to every creature, *He that believeth shall be saved?* Mark xvi 16.

Solut. Though it is true what our Lord Christ saith, that he that believeth, shall be saved; yet it is as true, that many believe, that shall never be saved: for Simon Magus believed; yea, James

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faith, *The Devils believe and tremble*, James ii. 19. Now none will say, these shall be saved.

As it is true, what the apostle saith, *All men have not faith*, 2 Thess iv. 2. So it is as true, that there are some men have faith, who are no whit the better for their faith.

You must know therefore, there is a two-fold faith, special and saving, common and not saving.

1. There is a saving faith; this is called, *Faith of the operation of God*, Col. ii. 12.

It is a work of God's own Spirit in the soul. It is such a faith, as rests and casts the soul wholly upon Christ, for grace and glory, pardon and peace, sanctification and salvation It is an united act of the whole soul, understanding, will, and affections, all concurring to unite the soul to an all-sufficient Redeemer It is such a faith as purifies the heart, Acts xv. 9. and makes it clean. It influences and gives strength and life to all other graces.

Now, whoever hath this faith, is a Christian indeed; this is the faith of God's elect, Tit. i. 3. But then,

2. There is a common faith, not saving; a fading and temporary faith, not saving: There is the faith of Simon Magus, as well as the faith of Simon Peter; Simon Magus believed, and yet was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, Acts viii. 13 23.

Now Simon Magus hath more followers than Simon Peter. The faith of most men will at

last be found, to be no better than the faith of Simon Magus. For.

1. The faith of most is but a temporary faith, it drops for a while, and then dies and perisheth; true and saving faith, such as is the faith of God's elect, Luke xxii. 23. cannot die; it may fail in the act, but not in the habit; the sap may not be in the branch, but it is always in the root.

That faith that perisheth, that faith a man may have and perish.

2. There is a faith that lies only in generals, not in particulars; as there is a general and particular object of faith, so there is a general and particular faith; the general object of faith is the whole scripture; the particular object of faith is Christ in the promise.

Now many have a general faith to believe all the scripture, and yet have no faith to make a particular application of Jesus Christ in the promise.

Devils and reprobates may believe the truth of the scripture, and what is written of the dying and suffering of Christ for sinners; but there are but few, that can close up themselves in the wounds of Christ, and by his stripes, fetch in healing to their souls.

3. There is faith that is seated in the understanding, but not in the will; this is a very common faith, many assent to the truth.

They believe all the attributes of God, that he is just, holy, wise, faithful, good, merciful, *&c.*

But yet they rest not upon him notwithstanding.

They believe the commands are true, but yet do not obey them; they believe the promises are true, but yet do not embrace and apply them; they believe the threatnings are true, but yet do not flee from them

Thus their faith lies in assent, but not consent; they have faith to confess a judgment, but none to take our execution; by assent they lay a foundation, but never build upon it by application.

They believe that Christ did to save them that believe, and yet they believe not in Christ that they may be saved.

O my brethren! it is not a believing head, but a believing man that makes a Christian, *With the heart man believes to righteousness*, Rom x. 10. Without this our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins, 1 Cor. vii. 17.

4. There is a faith without experience; many believe the word upon hear-say to be the word of God, but they never felt the power and virtue of it upon their hearts and consciences. Now what good is it to believe the truth of the word, if a man's conscience never felt the power of the word? What is it to believe the truth of the promise, if we never tasted the sweetness of the promise?

We are in this case, like a man that believes the description others make of strange countries, but never travelled them to know the truth: or as a patient that believes all the physician saith,

but yet tries none of his potions. We believe the word, because we cannot gain-say it; but yet we have no experience of any saving good wrought by the word, and are but almost a Christian.

5. There is faith that is without brokenness of heart, and doth not avail to melt or soften the heart, and therefore is not true faith: For the least true faith is ever joined with a bending will, and a broken heart.

6. This is a faith that transforms not the heart: faith without fruit, that doth not bring forth the new creature in the soul, but leaves it in a state of sin and death.

This is a faith that makes a man a sound professor, but not a sound believer: he believes the truth, but not as it is in Jesus, Eph iv. 21. For then it would change and transform him into the likeness of Jesus. He believes that a man must be changed, that would be saved, but yet is not savingly changed by believing: Thus while others believe to salvation, he believes to damnation: "For his web shall not become a garment, neither shall he covet himself with his work," Isa. lvi. 9

Now then, if a man's faith may be but temporary, or may ly only in generals, or may be seated in the understanding only, or may be without experience, or may be without a broken heart, or without a new heart; surely then a man may have faith, he may taste of this heavenly gift, and yet be but almost a Christian, Heb. vi. 4.

17. A man may go further yet; He may possibly have a love to the people of God, and yet be but almost a Christian. Every kind of love to those who are saints, is not a proof of our sainthip: Pharaoh loved Joseph, and advanced him to the second place of the kingdom, and yet Pharaoh was but a wicked man. Ahab loved Jehoshaphat, and make a league with him, and married his daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son, and yet Ahab was a wicked wretch

Objec. But you will say, This seems to contradict the testimony of the scripture, for that makes love to the saints and people of God, a sure proof of our regeneration, and interest in life eternal, 1 John iii. 14 *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.* Nay, the Spirit of God putteth this as a characteristical distinction between saints and sinners, in verse 10 "In this the children of God are manifest, "and the children of the devil: whosoever doth "not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that "loveth not his brother." By brethren, we do not understand brethren by place, those who are of the same country or nation, such are called brethren, Rom. ix. 3. Acts vii 23 25. Nor do we understand brethren by race, those who are descended of the same parents; such are called brethren, Mat. i 2. But by brethren, we understand brethren by grace, Phil. i 7. and supernatural regeneration, such as are the children of God; and these are the brethren, whom to love

is a sure sign that we are the children of God.

Solut. To this I answer, That there is a love of the children of God, which is a proof of our being the children of God.

As for instance, when we love them as such, for that very reason, as being the saints of God; when we love them, for the image of God which appeareth in them, because of that grace and holiness which shineth forth in their conversations, this is truly commendable; to love the godly for godliness sake, the saints for saintship sake, this is a sure testimony of our Christianity. The love of grace in another, is a good proof of the life of grace in ourselves. There can be no better evidence of the Spirit of Christ in us, than to love the image of Christ in others. For this is a certain truth, that a sinner cannot love a saint as such. An Israelite is an abomination to an Egyptian.

There is a contrariety and natural enmity between the two seeds, Gen. iii. 1. between the children of the world, and those whom the Father in his eternal love, hath chosen out of the world, John xv. 16.

It is likeness which is the great ground of love; *Simile simili guadet.* Now there is the highest dissimilitude and unlikeliness betwen an unregenerate sinner, and a child of God; and therefore a child of God cannot love a sinner as a sinner; *In whose eyes a vile person is contemned,* Psalm xv. 4. He may love him as a creature, he may love his soul, or he may love him under

some relation that he stands in to him. Thus God loves the damned spirits, as they are his creatures; but as fallen angels, he hateth them with an infinite hatred. So to love a sinner, *quatenus* a sinner, this a child of God cannot do; so neither can a sinner love a child of God, as a child of God. That he may love a child of God that I grant, but it is upon some other considerations; he may love a person that is holy, not the person for his holiness, but for some other respects: As,

1. A man may love a child of God, for his loving, peaceable, courteous deportment to all with whom he converseth. Religion beautifies the conversation of a man, and sets him off to the eye of the world. The grace of God is no friend to a morose, churlish, unmannerly behaviour among men; it provokes in us an affable demeanor and sweetness to all; and where this is found, it winneth respect and love from all.

2. A man may love a saint for his [illegible] greatness and splendour in the [illegible] outward [illegible] world, Jam ii 2, 3. Men are very apt to [illegible] honour worldly greatness; and therefore [illegible] the rich saint shall be loved and honoured, while the poor saint is hated and despised. This is, as if a man should value the goodness of his sword, by the imbroidery of his belt, or his horse for the beauty of his trappings, rather than for his strength and swiftness.

True love to the children of God, reaches to all the children of God, poor as well as rich, bound as well as free, ignoble as well as noble;

for the image of Christ is alike amiable and lovely in all.

3 A man may love a child of God for his fidelity, and usefulness in his place; where religion, in the power of it, taketh hold of a man's heart, it makes him true to all his betrustments, diligent in his business, faithful in all his relations, and this obligeth respect. A carnal master may prize a godly apprentice, or servant that makes conscience of pleasing his master, and is diligent in promoting his interest.

I might instance in many things of the like nature, as charity, beauty, wit, learning, parts, *&c.* which may procure love to the people of God from the men of the world. But this love is no proof of charity: For,

1. It is but a natural love, arising from some carnal respect, or self-ends; that love which is made by the scripture, an evidence of our regeneration, is a spiritual love, Col. i. 8. the principal load stone and attractive, whereof is grace and holiness: It is a love which embraceth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, Matth. x 41.

2. A carnal man's love to saints, is a limited and bounded love, it is not universal to all the seed, Esther x. 3. Now, as in sin, he that doth not make conscience of every sin, maketh conscience of no sin as sin; so he who doth not love all in whom the image of Christ is found, loveth none for that of the image of Christ which is found in them.

Now then, if the love we bear to the people

of God, may possibly arise from natural love only, or from some carnal respect; or if it be a limited love, not extended to all the people of God; then it is possible that a man may love the people of God, and yet be not better than almost a Christian.

18. A man may obey the commands of God, yea, many of the commands of God, and yet be but almost a Christian. Balaam seems very conscientious of steering his course by the compass of God's command, when Balak sent to him to come and curse the people of God: saith Balaam, *If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God*, Num. xxii. 18. And so in the 38. verse, saith he, *The word that God putteth in my mouth, that I shall speak.* The young man went far in obedience, Mat. xix. 20. *All these things have I kept from my youth up.* And yet he was but an hypocrite; for he forsook Christ after all.

Objec. But is it not said, "He that hath my "commandments and keepeth them, he it is that "loveth me, and he that loveth me, shall be "loved of my Father, and I will love him, and "manifest myself unto him?" John xiv. 21. And doth not our Lord Christ tell us expressly, *Ye are my friends, if ye do what I command you?* John xv. 14. And can a man be a friend of Christ, and yet be but almost a Christian.

Solut. I answer, That there is an obedience to the commands of Christ, which is a sure proof of our Christianity and friendship to Christ.

This obedience hath a three-fold property: It is evangelical, universal. continual.

First, It is evangelical obedience, and that both in matter and manner, ground and end.

In the matter of it, and that is what God requires, John xv. 14. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you.* In the manner of it, and that is according as God requires, John iv. 24. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit, and in truth.* In the ground of it, and that is, a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. 1 Tim i. 15. In the end of it, and that is, the honour and glory of God, *Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God,* 1 Cor. x 31.

2. It is an universal obedience, which extendeth itself to all the commands of God alike: It respects the duties of both tables; such was the obedience of Caleb, who followed the Lord fully, Num. xiv. 24 and of David, who had respect to all the commands, Psal. cxix 6.

3 It is a continual obedience, a putting the hand to God's plow without looking back: *I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end,* Psal. cxix. 112. *Incipere multorum est perseverare paucorum* Bern.

He that thus obeys the commands of God, is a Christian indeed, a friend of Christ indeed; but all obedience to the commands of God, is not this obedience: For,

1 There is a partial obedience, a piece-meal religion, when a man obeys God in one com-

mand, and not in another; owns him in one duty, and not in another; when a man seems to make conscience of the duties of one table, and not of the duties of another. This is the religion of most.

Now this obedience is no obedience; for as he that doth not love God above all, doth not love God at all; so he that doth not obey all the commands universally, cannot be said to obey any command truly: It is said of those in Samaria, that they feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after their own manner, 2 Kings xvii. 33. And yet in the next verse, it is said, *They feared not the Lord;* so that their fear of the Lord was no fear: In like manner that obedience to God is no obedience, which is but a partial and piecemeal obedience.

2. A man may obey much, and yet be in his old nature; and if so, then all his obedience in that estate, is but *splendidum peccatum*, a painted sin; "He that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; and he that burne h in ense, "as if he blessed an idol," Isa. lxvi. 3 The nature must be renewed, before the command can be rightly obeyed; *For a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit*, Mat. vii 18. Whatever a man's performances are, they cannot be called obedience, whilst the heart remaineth unregenerate, because the principle is false and unsound; every duty done by a believer, is accepted of God, as a part of his obedience to the will of God, tho' it be done in much weakness; because

tho' the believer's hand is weak, yet his heart is right: The hypocrite may have the most active hand, but the believer hath the most faithful and sincere heart, Eph. vi. 6 Rom. vi 17.

3. A man may obey the law, and yet have no love to the Law-giver; a carnal heart may do the command of God, but he cannot love God, and therefore cannot do it aright; for love to God, is the foundation and spring of all true obedience: Every command of God is to be done in love, this is the fulfilling of the law, Rom. xiii. 10. The apostle saith *Tho' I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and tho' I give my body to be burned,* (these seem to be acts of the highest obedience.) *yet if I have not love, it profits me nothing,* 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

4. I might add, that a man may be much in obedience, from sinister, base, and selfish ends, as the Pharisees prayed much, gave much alms, fasted much; but our Lord Christ tells us, that it was that they might be seen of men, and have glory of men, Mat vi. 2, 5, 16 Most of the hypocrites piety empties itself into vain glory, and therefore he is but an empty vine in all he doth, because he bringeth forth fruit to himself, Hosea x. 1.

It is the end that justifies the action; indeed a good end cannot make a bad action good; but yet the want of a good end, makes a good action bad.

Now then, if a man may obey the commands of God partially, and by halves; if he may do it,

and yet be in his natural state; if he may obey the commands of God, and yet not love God; if the ends of his obedience may be sinful and unwarrantable; then a man may be much in obeying the commands of God, and yet be but almost a Christian.

19. A man may be sanctified, and yet be but almost a Christian. Every kind of sanctification doth not make a man a new creature; for many are sanctified, that are never renewed. You read in Heb. x. 29 of them that count the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing.

Objec. But doth not the scripture tells us, "That both he that sanctifieth, and they who are "sanctified, are all one; for which cause he is "not ashamed to call them brethren?" Heb. ii. 11. And can a man be one with Christ, and yet be but almost a Christian?

Solut. To this answer, You must know there is a two-fold work of sanctification, spoken of in scripture.

The one, common and ineffectual.

The other, special and effectual.

That work of sanctification which is true and effectual, is a work of the Spirit of God in the soul, enabling it to the mortifying of all sin, to the obeying of every command, to the walking with God in all well-pleasing, Rom. viii. 13. 1 Pet i 2. Heb xiii.

Now whoever is thus sanctified, is one with him that sanctifieth; Christ will not be ashamed to call

such brethren; for they are flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, Eph v. 30.

But then, there is a more common work of sanctification, which is ineffectual, as to the two great works of dying to sin, and living to God, Rom. vi 11. This kind of sanctification may help to restrain sin, but not to mortify sin: It may lop off the boughs, but it layeth not the ax to the root of the tree: It sweeps and garnishes the room with common Virtues, Matth xii. 42. but doth not adorn it with saving graces; so that a man is but almost a Christian notwithstanding this sanctification. Or thus, there is an inward and outward sanctification.

Inward sanctification is that which deals with the soul and its faculties, understanding, conscience, will, memory, and affections. Outward sanctification is that which deals with the life and conversation. but these must concur to make a man a Christian indeed; therefore the apostle puts them together in his prayer for the Thessalonians, 1 Thes. v 23. "The God of peace "sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your "whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved "blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus "Christ." A man is then sanctified wholly, when he is sanctified both inwardly and outwardly, both in heart and affections, and in life and conversation; outward sanctification is not enough without inward, nor inward without outward; we must have both clean hands, and a pure heart, Psal xxiv. 4. *Non magna munera, sed immunis*

manus, mensque sincera Deo platens The heart must be pure, that we may not incur blame from within; and the hands must be clean, that we may not incur shame from without: we must have hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and bodies washed with pure water, Heb x. 22. We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. 2 Cor. vii. 1. Inward purity is the most excellent, but without the outward it is not sufficient; the true Christian is made up of both.

Now many have clean hands, but unclean hearts; they wash the out-side of the cup and platter, when all is filthy within, Matth. xxvii 4. Now the former without the latter, profiteth a man no more than it profited Pilate, who condemned Christ, to wash his hands, in presence of the people. *Manus abluit & tamen polluit:* he washed his hands in the blood of Christ, and yet had a hand in the death of Christ. The Egyptian temples were beautiful on the out-side, but within you should find nothing but some serpent or crocodile. *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly*, Rom. ii. 28. Judas was a saint without, but a sinner within; openly a disciple, but secretly a devil, John vi. 70.

Some pretend to inward sanctity, without outward; this is the pretence of the open sinner: Tho' I sometimes drop an idle foolish word, saith he, or tho' I sometimes swear an oath, yet I think no hurt; I thank God my heart is as good as the best: Such are like the sinner Moses men-

tions, that blessed himself in his heart, saying, *I shall have peace, tho' I walk in the imagination of mine own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst*, Deut. xxix. 19.

Some pretend to outward sanctity, without inward; such are like the Scribes and Pharisees, who outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity, Matth. xxiii. 28. Fair professors, but foul sinners.

Inward sanctity without outward, is impossible, for it will reform the life: outward sanctity without inward, is unprofitable, for it will not reform the heart: a man is not a true Christian without both: The body doth not make a man without the soul, nor the soul without the body; both are essential to the being of a man; so the sanctification of both, are essential to the being of the new man. True sanctification begins at the heart, but works out into the life and conversation; and if so, then a man may attain to an outward sanctification, and yet for want of the inward, be no better than almost a Christian.

20. And so I shall end this long pursuit of the almost Christian in his progress heaven-ward, with this one general conclusion,

A man may do all (as to external duties and worship) that a true Christian can, and when he hath done all, be but almost a Christian.

You must know all the commands of God, have an *intra*, and an *extra*; there is (as I may say) the body and the soul of the command.

And accordingly there is an internal and an

external worship of God.

Now the internal acts of worshipping of God, are to love God, to fear God, to delight in God, to trust in God, &c.

The external acts of worshipping of God, are by praying, teaching, hearing, &c.

Now there is a vast difference between these internal and external acts of worship (and indeed such a difference there is, that they distinguish the altogether from the almost Christian; the sincere believer from the unsound professor: and indeed in every thing the main difference between them doth ly.

1. Internal acts of worship are good. *propter fieri;* the goodness doth adhere intrinsically to the thing done: a man cannot love God, nor fear God, but it will be imputed to him for a gracious act, and a great part of his holiness.

But now external acts of worship are not denominated good, so much from the matter done, *propter fieri*, as from the manner of doing them: A man cannot sin in loving and delighting in God, but he may sin in praying and hearing, &c. for want of a due manner

2. Internal acts of worship put a goodness into external: It is our faith, our love, our fear of God, that makes our duties good.

3. They better the heart, and greaten the degrees of a man's holiness. External duties do not always do this: a man may pray, and yet his heart never the holier; he may hear the word, and yet his heart never the softer; but now the

more a man fears God, the wiser he is, Prov. i 7. the more a man loves God, the holier he is: Love is the perfection of holiness; we shall never be perfect in holiness, till we come to be perfect in love.

4. There is such an excellency in this internal worship, that he who mixes it with his external duties, is a true Christian when he doth least: but without this mixture, he is but almost a Christian, that doth most.

Internal acts of worship joined with outward, sanctifies them. and makes them accepted of God, tho' few: External acts of worship without inward, make them abhorred of God, tho' they be never so many.

So that tho' the almost Christian may do all those duties in hypocrisy, which a true Christian doth in sincerity; nay, tho' in doing external duties he may out-do the true Christian (as the comet makes a greater blaze than the true stars. If Elijah fast and mourn, Baal's priests will cut their flesh) yet he cannot do those internal duties that the meanest true Christian can.

The almost Christian can pray, but he cannot love God; he can teach, or hear, &c. but he cannot take delight in God.

Mark Job's query concerning the hypocrite: *Will he delight himself in the Almighty?* Job xxvii. 10. This is *Christianorum propria virtus.* He will pray to the Almighty, but will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he take pleasure in God? Ah! no; he will not, he cannot.

Delight in God ariseth from a suitableness between the faculty and the object: Now none more unsuitable than God and a carnal heart.

Delight arises from the having what we desire, and from enjoying what we have; how then can he delight in God, that neither enjoyeth, nor hath, nor truly desireth God? *Hæc propria est delectationis materia, si cum habeas quæ desideraveris desideratis perfruaris.* Plin. in loc.

Delight in God is one of the highest exercises of grace, and therefore how can he delight in God, that hath no grace?

Why then should any saint of God be discouraged, when he hears how far the almost Christian may go in the way to heaven, when-as he that is the weakest true believer, that hath the least true grace, goes farther than he? for he believes in, and loves God.

Should the almost Christian do less, as to matter of exernal duties, yet if he had but the least true faith, the least sincerity of love to Christ, he would surely be saved; and should the true Christian do ten times more duties than he doth, yet had he not faith in Christ, and love to Christ, he would surely be rejected.

O! therefore let not any weak believer be discouraged, tho' hypocrites may out-do them, and go beyond them in duty; for all their duties are done in hypocrisy: but your faith and love to God in duties, is a proof of your sincerity.

I do not speak this to discourage any soul in the doing of duties, or to beat down outward

performance, but to rectify the soul in the doing of them. As the Apostle saith, 1 Cor. xii. 32. *Covet earnestly the best gifts: but I yet shew unto you a more excellent way.* So, I say, covet the best gifts, covet to be much in duties, much in prayer, much in hearing, &c. But yet I shew unto you a more excellent way, and that is, the way of faith and love: Pray much, but then believe much too. Hear much, read much, but then love God much too. Delight in the word and ordinances of God much, but then delight in the God of ordinances more

And when you are most in duties, as to your use of them, O! then be sure to be above duties, as to your resting and dependance upon them. Would you be Christians indeed, altogether Christians? O then! be much in the use and exercise of ordinances; but be much more in faith and dependance upon Christ, and his righteousness: When your obedience is most to the command, then let your faith be most upon the promise.

The professor rests in his duties, and so is but almost a Christian: But you must be sure to rest upon the Lord Christ, this is the way to be altogether Christians: *For if ye believe, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

And thus I have answered the first query, viz: How far a man may go in the way to heaven, and yet be but almost a Christian.

1. He may have much knowledge.

2. He may have great gifts
3. He may have a high profession.
4. He may do much against sin.
5. He may desire grace.
6. He may tremble at the word.
7. He may delight in the word.
8. He may be a member of the Church of Christ.
9. He may have great hopes of heaven.
10. He may be under great visible changes.
11. He may be very zealous in the matters of religion.
12. He may be much in prayer
13. He may suffer for Christ
14. He may be called of God
15. He may in some sense have the Spirit of God
16. He may have some kind of faith
17. He may love the people of God
18. He may go far in obeying the commands of God
19. He may be in some sense sanctified.
20. He may do all (as to external duties) that a true Christian can, and yet be no better than almost a Christian.

The Second Question.

Why, or whence is it, that men go so far, or that they come to be almost Christians?

First, It may be to answer the call of conscience; tho' few men have grace, yet all men have conscience.

Now do but observe, and you shall see how far

conſcience may go in this work.

1. Conſcience owns a God, and that this God muſt be worſhipped and ſerved by the creature. Atheiſts in practice we have many, ſuch as the apoſtle ſpeaks of, Tit. i. 16. *They profeſs they know God, but in works they deny him.*

But Atheiſt in judgment none can be; Tully a heathen, could ſay, *Nulla gens tam barbara* &c.

Now there being ſuch a light in conſcience, as to diſcover that there is a God, and that he muſt be worſhipped; by the help of further light, the light of the word, a man may be enabled to do much in the ways of God, and yet his heart without a dram of grace.

2. Know this, that natural conſcience is capable of great improvement from the means of grace. Sitting under the ordinances, may exceedingly heighten the endowments of conſcience; though they do not ſanctify conſcience, it may be much regulated; tho' it be not all renewed, it may be enlightned, convinced, and yet never ſavingly converted and changed

Ye read in Heb. vi. 4. of ſome that were once enlightned, and taſted of the heavenly gifts, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt What work ſhall we call this? It could not be a ſaving work, a true change and converſion of ſtate; for notwithſtanding this enlightning, and taſting and partaking, yet they are here ſaid to fall away, ver. 6.

Had it been a true work of grace, they could never have fallen away from that: a believer

may fall, but he cannot fall away; he may fall foully, but he cannot fall finally, for underneath are the everlasting arms, Deut. xxxiii 27. his faith is established by the strength of that prayer of Christ, that our faith fail not, Luke xxii. 32. nay, he tells us expressly, that it is eternal life which he gives, from which we shall never perish, John xx. 28.

This work then here spoken of, cannot be any saving work, because it is not an abiding work; for they that are under it, are said to fall away from it: but tho' it be not a saving work, yet it is a supernatural work; it is an improvement made by the word, upon the conscience of men thro' the power of the Spirit, and therefore they are said to taste the good word of God, and to be made partakers of the Holy Ghost; they have not the Spirit abiding in them savingly, but striving with them, and working upon them convincingly, to the awakening and setting conscience on work. And conscience thus stirred, may carry a man very far in religion, and in the duties of the gospel, and yet be but a natural conscience.

A common work of the Spirit may stead a man very much in the duties of religion, tho' it must be a special work of the Spirit, that steads a man to salvation; a man may have the assisting presence of the Spirit, enabling him to preach and pray, and yet he may perish for want of the renewing presence of the Spirit enabling him to believe; Judas had the former, and yet perished for want of the latter; he had the Spirit assisting

him to cast out devils, but yet had not the Spirit renewing him, for he was cast out himself. Thus a man may have an improved conscience, and yet be a stranger to a renewed conscience; and conscience thus improved, may put a man very much upon duty.

I pray none of us mistake a conscience thus improved by the word, for a conscience renewed by the Spirit; the mistake is very easy, especially when a life of duties is the fruit of it.

3. The conscience of a natural man is subject to distress and trouble; tho' a natural conscience is not sanctified with grace, yet it is often troubled at sin: Trouble of conscience is not an incident to believers only, but sometimes to unbelievers also. A believer's conscience is sometimes troubled when his sin is truly pardoned; and a natural man's conscience is troubled for sin, tho' it is never freed from sin. God sometimes sets home the word on the sinner's conscience, and applies the terrors of the law to it, and this fills the soul with fear, and horror of death and hell: Now in this case, the soul usually betakes itself to a life of duties, merely to fence trouble out of conscience.

When Absalom sets fire on Joab's corn-fields, 2 Sam. xiv. 30, 31 then he runs to him, tho' he refused before So when God lets a spark of hell (as it were) fall upon the sinner's conscience, in applying the terrors of the word, this drives the sinner to a life of duties, which he never minded before. The ground of many a

man's engaging in religion, is the trouble of his conscience; and the end of his continuing in religion, is the quieting of conscience; if conscience would never check him, God should never hear from him.

Natural conscience hath a voice, and speaks aloud many times in the sinner's ears, and telleth him this ought not to be done, God must not be forgotten; the commands of God ought not to be slighted, living in sin will be the ruin of the soul; and hence it is that a natural man runs to duties, and takes up a lifeless and graceless profession, that he may thereby silence conscience. As a man sick in his stomach, whatever sweet morsel he hath eaten, he brings up all; and altho' it was sweet in the eating, yet it is bitter in the rising

So it fareth with the sinner, when he is sermon-sick, or conscience-sick; though his sin was sweet in the practice, yet the thought of it riseth bitter upon the conscience; and then his profession of religion, is the pill he rolleth about in his mouth, to take away the bitterness of sin's taste.

4. Natural conscience enlightned by the word, may discover to a man much of the misery of a natural state; tho' not effectual to bring him out of it, yet so as to make him restless and weary in it; it may shew a sinner his nakedness, and hereupon the soul runneth to a life of duties, thinking hereby to stead the misery of h s case, and to make a covering for his nakedness. It is said, Gen. iii 7, That when Adam and Eve saw they

were naked, they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves a covering. So when once the sinner seeth his nakedness and vileness by reason of sin, whereas he should run to Christ and close with him, and beg his righteousness for a covering, that the shame of his nakedness do not appear, Rev. iii. 18. he rather runneth to a life of duties and performances, and thus maketh himself a covering with fig-leaves of a profession, without Christ truly embraced, and conscience at all renewed Natural man would fain be his own Saviour, and supposeth a change of state, to be a thing within his own power, and that the true work of grace lieth in the leaving off the practice of sin, and taking up a life of duties; and therefore upon this principle, doth many a graceless professor outstrip a true believer; for he resteth in his own performances, and hopeth these will commend him to God

Quest. If a natural conscience may go thus far? then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and a renewed conscience in believers? Or how may I know, whether the workings of my conscience, be the workings of nature only, or else by grace wrought in it?

Answ. I grant, that it is difficult to distinguish between the one and the other, and the difficulty hath a two-fold rise.

1 It ariseth from that hypocrisy that is in the best saints; the weakest believer is no hypocrite, but yet there is some hypocrisy in the strongest

believer; where there is most grace, there is some sin, and where there is most sincerity, yet there is some hypocrisy.

Now it is very incident to a tender conscience to misgive and mistrust its state, upon the sight of any sin; when he sees hypocrisy break out in any duty or performance, then he complains, Surely my aims are not sincere, my conscience is not renewed, it is but natural conscience enlightned, not by grace purged and changed. Pigmalion made an image so lively, that he deceived himself, and taking the picture for a person, fell in love with the picture.

2. It ariseth from that resemblance there is between grace and hypocrisy; for hypocrisy is a resemblance of grace without substance, the likeness of grace without the life of grace. There is no grace, but an hypocrite may have somewhat like it; and there is no duty done by a Christian, but an hypocrite may outstrip him in it. Now when one that hath not true grace, shall go further than one that hath, this may well make the believer question, whether his grace be true or not; or whether the workings of his conscience be not the workings of nature only, rather than of grace wrought in it.

But to answer the question, you may make a judgment of this in these seven particulars.

1. If a natural man's conscience putteth him upon duty, he doth usually bound himself in the God's work. His duties are limited, his obedience is a limited obedience; he doth one duty, and ne-

glecteth another; he picketh and chooseth among the commands of God; obeyeth one, and slighteth another. Thus much is enough, what needs any more? If I do thus and thus, I shall go to heaven at last.

But now where conscience is renewed by grace, there it is otherwise. Tho' there may be many weaknesses which accompanies its duties, yet that soul never bounds itself in working after God; it never loves God so much, but still it would love him more; nor seeks him so much, but still it would seek him more; nor doth it serve God so well at any time, but still it makes conscience of serving him better. A renewed conscience is a spring of universal obedience, Psalm cxix. 128. for it seeth an infinite excellency, and goodness, and holiness in God, and therefore would fain have its service rise up towards some proportionableness to the object: a God of infinite excellency and goodness, should have infinite love, saith Conscience; an holy God, should have service from an holy heart, saith Conscience.

Now then, if I set bounds to my love to God, or to my service to God; if I limit myself in my obedience to the holy God; love one commandment, and slight another; obey in one point, and yet ly cross in another; then is all I do but the working of a natural conscience. But on the other hand, If I love the Lord with my whole heart and soul, and serve him with all my might and strength, Mat xxii 37. Mark xi. 13. If I esteem all God's precepts concerning all things

to be right, and have a respect to all the commands, then is my love and service from a renewed conscience.

2. If a natural man's conscience check or accuse for sin, then he seeketh to stop the mouth of it, but not to satisfy it: Most of the natural man's duties are to still and stifle conscience.

But now the believer chooseth rather to let conscience cry, than to stop the mouth of it, until he can do it upon good terms; until he can fetch in satisfaction to it, from the blood of Jesus Christ, by fresh acts of faith apprehended and applied.

The natural man seeketh to still the noise of conscience, rather than to remove the guilt; the believer seeketh the removal of guilt by the application of Christ's blood, and then conscience is quiet of itself. As a foolish man having a mote fallen into his eye, and making it water, he wipeth away the water, and labours to keep it dry, but never searcheth his eye to get out the mote; but a wise man mindeth not so much the wiping, as the searching his eye; somewhat is got in, and that causeth the watering, and therefore the cause must be removed.

Now then, if when conscience accuseth for sin, I take up a life of duties, a form of godliness to stop the mouth of conscience, and if hereupon conscience be still and quiet, then is this but a natural conscience; but if when conscience checks, it will not be satisfied with any thing, but the blood of Christ, and therefore I use duties to

bring me to Christ; and if I beg the sprinkling of his blood upon conscience, and labour not so much to stop the mouth of it, as to remove guilt from it, then is this a renewed conscience.

3 There is a natural man, let him go never so far, let him do never so much in matters of religion, but still he hath his Delilah, his bosom-lust. Judas went far, John xii. 6. but he carried his covetousness along with him. Herod went far, Mark vi. 20. he did many things under the force of John's ministry, but yet there was one thing he did not; he did not put away his brother's wife; his Herodias lay in his bosom still. Nay, commonly all the natural man's duties, are to hide some sin, his profession is only made use of for a cover-shame.

But now the renewed conscience hateth all sin, as David said, *I hate every false way*, Psal. cxix. 128. *He regardeth no iniquity in his heart*, Psal. lxvi. 18. He useth duties not to cover sin, but to help work down, and work out sin.

Now then, if I profess religion; if I make mention of the name of the Lord, and yet through breaking the law, dishonour God, Rom. ii. 23. If I live in the love of any sin, and make use of my profession to cover it, then am I an hypocrite, and my duties flow but from a natural conscience; But on the other hand, *If I name the name of the Lord Jesus, and withal depart from iniquity*, 2 Tim. ii. 9. If I use duties not to cover, but to discover and mortify sin, then I am upright before God, and my duties flow from a renewed

conscience.

4. A natural man prides himself in his duties; if he be much in duty, then he is much lifted up under duty; so did the Pharisee, Luke xviii. 11, 12 *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are:* and why? here lay the difference: why? *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all,* &c.

But now take a gracious heart, a renewed conscience, and when his duties are at highest, then is his heart at lowest. Thus it was with the apostle Paul, he was much in service, in season, and out of season, 2 Tim. ii. 4. Preaching up the Lord Jesus with all boldness and earnestness, and yet very humble in a sense of his own unworthiness under all; "I am not worthy to be "called an apostle, 1 Cor. xv. 9. To me who "am less than the least of all saints, is this grace "given, that I should preach among the Gen-"tiles the unsearchable riches of Christ," Eph. iii. 8. And again, 1 Tim. i. 15. *Of sinners I am chief.* Thus a believer when he is highest in duties, then he is lowest humility: duty puffeth up the hypocrite; but a believer comes away humbled; and why? because the hypocrite hath had no visions of God, he hath seen only his own gifts and parts, and this exalteth him; but the believer hath seen God, and enjoyed communion with God, and this humbleth him. Communion with God, tho' it be very refreshing, yet it is also very abasing and humbling to the creature: Hierom observeth on Zeph. i. 1. where it is

said, that Cushi was the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah. That Amariah signifies the word of the Lord; Gedaliah signifies the greatness of the Lord; and Cushi is interpreted humility, or my Æthiopian. So that, saith he, from the word of the Lord, cometh a sight of the greatness of the Lord; and from a sight of the greatness of the Lord, cometh humility.

Now then, if I pride myself in any duty, and am puffed up under my performances, then have I not seen nor met with God in any duty. But on the other hand, if when my gifts are at highest, my heart is at lowest; if when my spirit is most raised, my heart is then most humbled; if in the midst of all my services, I can maintain a sense of my unworthiness; if Cushi be the son of Gedaliah, then have I seen and had communion with God in duty, and my performances are from a renewed conscience.

5. Look what that is to which the heart doth sweetly tender the glory of a duty, and that is the principle of the duty: In Hab. i. 16. ye read of them that sacrifice to their net, and that burn incense to their drag; where the glory of an action is rendered to a man's self, the principle of that action is self, all rivers run into the sea, Eccles. i. 7. that is an argument they came from the sea; so when all a man's duties terminate in self, then is self the principle of all.

Now all the natural man's duties run into himself; he was never by a thorough work of grace truly cast out of himself, and brought to deny

himself; and therefore he can rise no higher than himself in all he doth; he was never brought to be poor in spirit, and so to live upon another; to be carried out of all duties to Jesus Christ.

But the believer giveth the glory of all his services to God, Psalm cxv. 1. what strength or life there is in duty, God hath all the glory, for he is by grace outed of himself, and therefore seeth no excellency, or worthiness in himself.

I laboured more abundantly than they all, saith the apostle; but to whom doth he ascribe the glory of this? to Self! No, *Yet not I,* saith he, *but the grace of God which was with me,* 1 Cor. xv. 10. When ever the grace of Christ is wrought in the heart as a principle of duty, you shall find the soul when it is most carried out with a *yet not I,* in the mouth of it: *I live, yet not I: I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I,* Gal. ii. 20. Self is declaimed, and Christ most advanced, when it is from grace that the heart is quickned; the twenty-four angels cast their crowns at Christ's feet, Rev. iv. 10.

There are two things very hard; one is, to take the shame of our sins to ourselves; the other is, to give the glory of our services to Christ.

Now, then, if I sacrifice to my own net, if I aim at my own credit or profit, and give the glory of all I do to self, then do I sow to the flesh, Gal. vi. 8. and was never yet cast out of self, but act only from a natural conscience; but if I give the glory of all my strength and life in duty

only to God, if I magnify grace in all, and can truly say in all I do, *yet not I*, then am I truly cast out of self, and do what I do with a renewed conscience.

6 Tho' a natural conscience may put a man much upon service, yet it never presseth to the attainment of holiness; so that he carrieth an unsanctified heart under all. How long was Judas a professor, and yet not one dram of that grace he had got: The foolish virgins (you know) took their lamps, but took no oil in their vessels, Mat. xxv. 3. that is, they looked more after a profession, than after sanctification.

But now when a renewed conscience putteth a man upon duty, it is succeeded with the growth of holiness; as grace helpeth to the doing of duty; so duty helpeth to the growing of grace; a believer is the more holy, and the more heavenly, by his being much in duties

Now then, if I am much in a life of duties, and yet a stranger to a life of holiness; if I maintain a high profession, and yet not have a true work of sanctification; if (like children in the rickets) I grow big in the head, but weak in the feet, then have I gifts and parts, but no grace; and tho' I am much in service, yet have I but a natural conscience. But on the other hand, if the holiness of my conversation carrieth a proportion to my profession; if I am not a hearer of the word only, but a doer of it; if grace groweth in seasons of duty, then do I act in the things of God from a renewed conscience.

7. And lastly, If a natural conscience be the spring of duty, why then runs this spring fastest at first, and so abated, and at last drieth up? But if a renewed conscience, a sanctified heart be the spring of duty, then this spring will never dry up, it will run always from first to last, and run quicker, at the last than first. "I know thy works, "and the last to be more than the first, Rev. ii. "19. The righteous shall hold on his way, and "he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and "stronger," Job xvii. 9.

But you will say, Why doth that man abate and languish in his duties, that doth them from a natural conscience, more than he that doth them from a renewed conscience?

The reason is, because they grow upon a fallable root, a decaying root, and that is nature; nature is a fading root, and so are all its fruits fading; but the duties done by a renewed conscience, are fruits that grow upon a lasting root, and that is Christ: Gifts have their root in nature, but grace hath its roots in Christ; and therefore the weakest grace shall outlive the greatest gifts and parts, because there is life in the root of one, and not in the root of the other: Gifts and graces differ like the leather of your shoe, and the skin of your feet; take a pair of shoes that have the thickest soles, and if you go much in them, the leather weareth out, and in a little time a man's foot cometh to the ground: But now a man that goeth bare-foot all his days, the skin of his feet doth not wear out; why should not the

sole of his foot sooner wear out, than the sole of his shoe, for the leather is much thicker than the skin? The reason is, because there is life in the one, and not in the other; there is life in the skin of the foot, and therefore that holdeth out, and groweth thicker and thicker, harder and harder; but there is no life in the sole of his shoe, and therefore that weareth out, and waxeth thinner and thinner; so it is with gifts and graces.

Now then, if I decay and abate, and grow weary of a profession, and fall away at last; if I begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh, then was all I did from a natural conscience; but if I grow and hold out, if I persevere to the end, and my last works be more than my first, then do I act from a renewed conscience.

And thus I have in seven things answered that question, viz. If conscience may go thus far in putting a man upon duties; then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and renewed conscience in believers?

And that is the first answer to the main query, viz. Whence is it, that many men go so far, as that they come to be almost Christians?

It is to answer the call of conscience.

Secondly, It is from the power of the word under which they live: Tho' the word doth not work effectually upon all, yet it hath a great power upon the hearts of sinners to reform them tho' not to renew them.

1. It hath *vim discriminationis*, a discerning, discovering power; Heb. iv. 12. "The word of "God is quick, and powerful, sharper than any "two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing "asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and "marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and "intents of the heart." This is the glass where every man may see what manner of man he is, James i. 23. As the light of the sun discovers the little motes, so the light of the word shining into conscience, discovers little sins.

2. The word hath *vim legislativam*, the power of a law; it gives law to the whole soul, binds conscience; it is therefore frequently called the law in scripture, *Unless thy law had been my delight*, &c. Psal. cxix. 92. *To the law, and to the testimony*, Isa. viii. 20. This is spoken of the whole word of God, which is therefore called a law, because of its binding power upon the conscience.

3. It hath *vim judicativam*, a judging power; John xii. 48. *The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day:* The sentence that God will pass upon sinners hereafter, is no other than what the word passeth upon them here; the judgment-day of God, is not a day wherein God will pass any new sentence, but it is such a day wherein God will make a solemn public ratification, of the judgment passed by the ministry of the word upon souls here; this I gather clearly from Matth. xviii. 18. *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound*

in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven: So that by bringing a man's heart to the word, and trying it by that, he may quickly know what that sentence is, that God will pass upon his soul in the last day; for as the judgment of the word is now, such will the judgment of God be, concerning him in the last day.

Indeed there is a two-fold power farther than this, in the word

It hath *vim plasticam, et vim salvificam.*

A begetting, and saving power; but this is put forth only upon some.

But the other is more extensive, and hath a great casuality upon a profession of goodness, even among them that have no grace.

A man that is under this three fold power of discerning law and judgment, that hath his heart ransacked and discovered, his conscience bound and awed, his state and sinful condition judged and condemned, may take up resolution of a new life, and convert himself to a great profession of religion.

3. A man may go far in this course of profession, from affection of applause and credit, and to get a name in the world; as it is said of the Pharisees, "They love to pray in the market-"places, and in the corners of the streets, to be "seen of men," Mat vi. 5.

Many are of Machiavel's principle, That the appearance of virtue is to be sought; because tho' the use of it is a trouble, yet the credit of

it is a help.

Jerom in his epistle to Julian, calls such, *Popularis in aure vilia mancipia*, the base bond-slaves of common fame. Many a man doth that for credit, that he will not do for conscience, and own religion more for the sake of lust, than for the sake of Christ; thus making God's stream to turn the devil's mill.

Fourthly, It is from a desire of salvation; there is in all men a desire of salvation; it is natural to every being, to love and seek its own preservation; *Who will shew us any good?* Psalm iv. 6 This is the language of nature, seeking happiness to itself.

Many a man may be carried so far out in the desires of salvation, as to do many things to obtain it.

So did the young man, *Good Master, what good things shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* He went far, and did much, obeyed many commands, and all out of a desire of salvation: So then, put these together, and there is an answer to that question.

The call of conscience.

The power of the word.

The affection of credit. And,

The desire of salvation.

These may carry a man so far, as to be almost a Christian.

The third question propounded, is this:

Quest. Thirdly, Whence is it, that many are but almost Christians, when they have gone thus

far? what is the cause of this?

Ans. I might multiply answers to this question, but I shall instance in two only, which I judge the most material.

First, It is for want of right and sound conviction: If a man be not throughly convinced of sin, and his heart truly broken, whatever his profession of godliness may be, yet he will be sure to miscarry; every work of conviction is not a thorough work; there are convictions that are only natural and rational, but not from the powerful work of the Spirit of God

Rational conviction is that which proceeds from the working of a natural conscience, charging guilt from the light of nature, by the help of those common principles of reason that are in all men. This is the conviction you read of, Rom ii. 14. 15. It is said, that the Gentiles who had not the law, yet had their conscience bearing witness, and accusing or excusing one another. Tho' they had not the light of scripture, yet had they conviction from the light of nature. Now by the help of the gospel light, these convictions may be much improved, and yet the heart not renewed.

But then, there is a spiritual conviction, and this is that work of the Spirit of God upon the sinner's heart by the word, whereby the guilt and filth of sin is fully discovered, and the wo and misery of a natural state distinctly set home upon the conscience, to the dread and terror of the sinner, whilst he abides in that state and

condition.

And this is the conviction that is a found and thorough work. Many have their convictions, but not this spiritual conviction.

Query. Now you will say, Suppose I am at any time under conviction, how shall I know whether my convictions be only from a natural conscience, or whether they be from the Spirit of God?

Ans. I should digress too much to draw out the solution of this question to its just length: I shall therefore in five things, only lay down the most considerable difference, between the one and the other.

1. Natural convictions reach chiefly to open and scandalous sins, sins against the light of nature; for natural conviction can reach no farther than natural light.

But spiritual convictions reach to secret, inward and undiscerned sins, such as hypocrisy, formality, lukewarmness, deadness, and hardness of heart, &c.

Observe then, whether your trouble for sin looks inward as well as outward, and reaches not only to open sins, but to secret lusts, to inward and spiritual sins; and if so, this is a sure sign of the work of the Spirit, because the trouble occasioned by these sins, bears a more immediate relation to the holiness of God, who only is offended by them, they being such as none else can see or know.

2. Natural convictions deal only with a man's

converſation, not with his ſtate and condition; with ſins actual, not original; but ſpiritual convictions reach to all ſins, to ſins of heart, as well as ſins of life; to the ſin of our nature, as well as the ſins of practice; to the ſin that is born in us, as well as the ſin that is done by us.

Where the Spirit of the Lord cometh to work effectually in a ſoul, he holdeth the glaſs of the law before the ſinners eyes, and openeth his eyes to look into the glaſs, and to ſee all that deformity and filthineſs that is in his heart and nature.

The apoſtle Paul ſaid, *I had not known ſin but by the law*, Rom. vii. 7. How can this be true, that he had not known ſin but by the law, when as the light of nature diſcovers ſin? It is ſaid of the Gentiles, *That having not the law, they are a law unto themſelves*, Rom. ii. 14.

This ſin therefore that the apoſtle ſpeaks of, is not to be underſtood of ſin actual, but of ſin original: I had not known the pollution of nature, that fountain of ſin that is within, this I had not known but by the law; and indeed this is a diſcovery that natural light cannot make. It is true the philoſopher could ſay, That luſt is the firſt and chief of all ſins: But I cannot think he meant it of original ſins, but of the inordinacy of appetite and deſire at moſt, for I find that the wiſeſt of the philoſophers underſtood nothing of original ſin. Hear Seneca, *Erras ſi tecum vitia naſci putas, ſuper venerunt, ingeſta*

sunt. Sin is not born with thee, but brought in since. *Tam sine vitio quam sine virtute nascimur.*

Quintilian saith. It is more marvel that any one man sins, than that all men should live honestly, sin is so against the nature of men. How blind were they in this point? And so was Paul, till the Spirit of the Lord discovered it to him by the word. And indeed, this is a discovery proper to the Spirit. It is He that makes the sinner see all the deformity and filthiness that is within; it is He that pulleth off all the sinner's rags, and makes him see his naked and wretched condition: it is He that shows us the blindness of the mind, the stubbornness of the will, the disorderliness of the affections, the seardness of the conscience, the plague of our hearts, and the sin of our nature, and therein the desperateness of our state.

3. Natural convictions carry the soul out, to look more on the evil that comes by sin, than on the evil that is in sin. So that the soul under this conviction, is more troubled at the dread of hell and wrath and damnation, than at the vileness and heinous nature of sin.

But now spiritual convictions work the soul, into a greater sensibleness of the evil that is in sin, than of the evil that comes by sin; the dishonour done to God, by walking contrary to his will; the wounds that are made in the heart of Christ, the grief that the Holy Spirit of God is put to, this wounds the soul more than a thou-

ſand hells.

4. Natural convictions are not durable, they are quickly worn out; they are like a ſlight cut in the ſkin, that bleeds a little, and is ſore for the preſent, but is healed again, and in a few days not ſo much as a ſcar to be ſeen.

But ſpiritual convictions are durable, they cannot be worn out, they abide in the ſoul till they have reached their end, which is the change of the ſinner.

The convictions of the Spirit, are like a deep wound in the fleſh that goes to the bone, and ſeems to endanger the life of the patient, and is not healed but with great ſkill; and when it is healed, leaves a ſcar behind it; that when the patient is well, yet he can ſay, Here is the mark of my wound, which will never wear out.

So a ſoul that is under ſpiritual conviction, his wound is deep, and not to be healed, but by the great ſkill of the heavenly Phyſician; and when it is healed, there are the tokens of it remaining in the ſoul, that can never be worn out; ſo that the ſoul may ſay, Here are the marks and ſigns of my convictions ſtill in my ſoul, *Una eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit.*

5 Natural convictions makes the ſoul ſhy of God. Guilt works fear, and fear cauſes eſtrangedneſs: Thus it was with Adam, Gen. iii 18. when he ſaw his nakedneſs, he ran away and hid himſelf from God.

Now ſpiritual convictions drive not the ſoul

from God, but unto God: Ephraim's conviction was spiritual, and he runs to God, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned,* Jer. iii. 18. So that there is you see, a great difference between conviction and conversion, between that which is natural, and that which is spiritual, that which is common, and that which is saving.

Yea, such is the difference, that tho' a man have never so much of the former, yet if he be without the latter, he is but almost a Christian; and therefore he hath great reason to enquire more after this spiritual conviction. For,

1. Spiritual conviction is an essential part of sound conversion; conversion begins here: true conversion begins in convictions, and true convictions end in conversion.

Till the sinner be convinced of sin, he can never be converted from sin: Christ's coming was as a Saviour to do and die for sinners, and the Spirit's coming is to convince us as sinners, that we may close with Christ as a Saviour; till sin be throughly discovered to us, interest in the blood of Christ cannot rightly be claimed by us; nay, so long as sin is unseen, Christ will be unsought; *They that be whole, need not the Physician, but they that are sick,* Mat. ix. 12.

2. Slight and common convictions (when they are but skin-deep) are the cause of much hypocrisy: Slight convictions may bring the soul to clasp about Christ, but not to close with Christ, and this is the guise of an hypocrite. I know no other rise and spring of hypocrisy, like this of

slight convictions; this hath filled the church of Christ with hypocrites.

Nay, it is not only the spring of hypocrisy, but it is also the spring of apostacy: What was the cause that the seed was said to wither away? Mat. xiii. 5, 6. it was because it had no deepness of earth. Where there is thorough conviction, there is a depth of earth in the heart; and there the seed of the word grows; but where convictions are slight and common, there the seed withers for want of depth: So that you see clearly in this one instance, whence it is that many are but almost Christians, when they have gone so far in religion, viz for want of sound convictions.

2 (And this hath a near relation to the former) It is for want of a thorough work of grace first wrought in the heart; where this is not, all a man's following profession comes to nothing; that scholar is never like to read well, that will needs be in his grammar, before he is out of his primmer. Cloth that is not wrought well in the loom, will neither wear well, nor wear long, it will do little service; so that Christian that doth not well come off the loom, that hath not a thorough work of grace in his heart, will never wear well, he will shrink in the wearing, and never do much service for God: It is not the pruning of a bad tree, will make it bring forth good fruit; but the tree must be good, before the fruit can be made good, Mat. xii. 33.

He that takes up a profession of religion with

an unbroken heart, will never serve Christ in that profession with his whole heart

If there be not a true change in that man's heart that yet goes far, and doth much in the ways of God, to be sure he will either die an hypocrite, or an apostate.

Look as in nature, if a man come into a profession of religion, yet be not right born; if he be not begotten of God, and born of the Spirit, John iii. 5. if there be not a thorough work of grace in his heart, all his profession of religion will never mend him; he may be bolstered out by a life of duties, but he will be an hypocrite at last, for want of a thorough work at first; a form of godliness may cover his crookedness, but will never cure it.

A man can never be a true Christian, nor accepted of God, tho' in the highest profession of religion, without a work of grace in the heart. For,

1. There must be answerableness in the frame of that man's heart, that would be accepted of God, to the duties done by him: his spirit and affections within, must carry a proportion to his profession without: Prayer without faith, obedience to law, given without fear and holy reverence of the Law-giver, God abhors. Acts of internal worship, must answer the duties of external worship.

Now where there is no grace wrought in the heart, there can never be any proportion or answerableness in the frame of that man's heart,

to the duties done by him.

2. Those duties that find acceptance with God, must be done in sincerity. God doth not take our duties by tale, nor judge of us according to the frequency of our performances, but according to the sincerity of our hearts in the performance. It is this that commends both the doer and the duty to God; with sincerity, God accepts the least we do; without sincerity, God rejects the most we do, or can do. This is that temper of Spirit which God highly delights in, Prov. xi. 20. *They that are of a froward heart, are an abomination to the Lord; but such as are upright in their way, are his delight.* 2 Chron. xix 17.

The apostle gives it a great epithet, he calls it 2 Cor. i. 12 *the sincerity of God*, that is. such a sincerity as is his special work upon the soul, setting the heart right and upright before him in all his ways.

This is the crown of all our graces, and the commendation of all our duties; thousands perish and go to hell in the midst of all their performances and duties, merely for want of a little sincerity of heart to God.

Now where there is not a change of state, a work of grace in the heart, there can be no sincerity to God-ward; for this is not *quid proveniens a natura*, it is not a herb that grows in nature's garden; the heart of man is naturally deceitful, and desperately wicked, Jer. xvii. 9. more opposite to sincerity than to any thing; as

things corrupted carry a greater dissimilitude to what they were, than to any thing else which they never were.

God made man upright: now man voluntarily losing this, is become more unlike to himself than to any thing below himself; he is more like a lion, a wolf, a bear, a serpent, a toad than to a man in innocency.

So that it is impossible to find sincerity in any soul, till there be a work of grace wrought there by the Spirit of God; and hence it is that a man is but almost a Christian, when he hath done all.

The fourth Question.

4. What is the reason that many go no farther in their profession of religion, than to be almost a Christian?

1. It is because they deceive themselves in the truth of their own condition; they mistake their state, and think it good and safe, when it is bad and dangerous. A man may look upon himself as a member of Christ, and yet God may look upon him as a vessel of wrath; as a child of God by looking more upon his sins than his graces, more upon his failings than his faith, more upon indwelling lust, than renewing grace, may think his case very bad, when it is very good; *I am black*, saith the spouse, Cant. i. 5. and yet saith Christ, *O thou fairest among women*, ver. 8. So the sinner by looking more upon his duties than his sins, may think he sees his name written in the book of life, and yet be in the account of God, a very reprobate.

There is nothing more common than for a man to think himself something when he is nothing, and so he deceives himself, Gal. vi. 3. Many a man blesses himself in his interest in Christ, when he is indeed a stranger to him: many a man thinks his sin pardoned, when alas! he is still in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity, Acts viii. 23. Many a man thinks he hath grace, when he hath none: *There is*, saith Solomon, *that maketh himself rich, and yet hath nothing*, Prov. xiii. 7. This was the very temper of Laodicea, *Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not* (pray mind that) *that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor and naked*, Rev. iii. 17.

Thou knowest not] As bad as she was, she thought her state good; as poor as she was in grace, she thought she was rich; as miserable and naked as she was, yet she thought she had need of nothing.

Now there are several rises and grounds of this mistake. I will name five to you.

1. The desperate deceitfulness of the heart of every natural man: *Supplantativum cor pre omnibus*, Jer. xvii. 9. *The heart is deceitful above all things*: the Hebrew is, *Gnakob chalach micol*. The word *Gnakob*, is the same with Jacob's name: Now, you know, he was a supplanter of his brother Esau: *He is rightly called Jacob*, saith he, *for he hath supplanted me these two times*, Gen. xxvii. 36. So the word signifies to be fraudulent and subtle, deceitful and supplanting. Thus

is the heart of every natural man, deceitful above all things.

You read of the deceitfulness of the tongue, Psal. lii. 4 and of the deceitfulness of riches, Matth xiii. 22. and of the deceitfulness of beauty, Prov. xxxi 30. and of the deceitfulness of friends, Job vi. 15 but yet the heart is deceitful above them all: Nay, you read of the deceitfulness of Satan, Rev. xx. 3. yet truly a man's heart is a greater deceiver than he; for he could never deceive a man, if his own heart did not deceive him. Now it is from hence that a man presumes upon the goodness of his case, from the desperate treachery of his own heart.

How common is it for men to boast of the goodness of their hearts? I thank God, tho' I do not make such a show and pretence as some do, yet I have as good a heart as the best. O do but hear Solomon in this case, *He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool*, Prov xxviii 26. Will any wise man commit his money to a cut-purse? Will he trust a cheat? It is a good rule, "Remember to distrust:" And it was Augustine's prayer, *Domine, libera me a me ipso.* That man that trusts to his own heart, shall be sure to find himself deceived at last.

2. This mistake arises from the pride of a man's spirit: there is a proud heart in every natural man: there was much of this pride in Adam's sin, and there is much of it in all Adam's sons. It is a radical sin, and from hence ariseth this over-weaning opinion of man's state and

condition. Solomon saith, *Be not righteous overmuch* Eccles. vii. 16 Augustine (*Sent* 365.) speaking occasionally of those words, saith, It is not *Justitia sapentis*, but *Superbia præsamentis*: not meant of the righteousness of the wise man, but of the pride of the presumptuous man. Now in this sense every carnal man is righteous overmuch; tho' he had none of that righteousness which commends him to God, viz. the righteousness of Christ, yet he hath too much of that righteousness which commends him to himself, and that is self-righteousness.

A proud man hath an eye to see his beauty, but not his deformity; his parts but not his spots; his seeming righteousness, but not his real wretchedness. It must be a work of grace that must show a man the want of grace. The haughty eye looks upwards, but the humble eye looks downward; and therefore this is the believer's motto, "The least of saints,—the greatest "of sinners" Eph iii. 8 But the carnal man's motto is, *I thank God, I am not as other men*, Luke xviii. 11

3. Many deceive themselves with common grace instead of saving, thro' that resemblance that is between them As many take counterfeit money for currant coin, so do too many take common grace for true: *In similibus facilis est deceptio.* Saul took the Devil for Samuel, because he appeared in the mantle of Samuel, 1 Sam. xxi 14 So many take common grace for saving, because it is like saving grace. A

man may be under a ſupernatural work, and yet fall ſhort of a ſaving work: The firſt raiſeth nature, the ſecond only reneweth nature. Tho' every ſaving work of the Spirit be ſupernatural, yet every ſupernatural work of the Spirit is not ſaving; and hence many deceive their own ſouls by taking a ſupernatural work for a ſaving work.

4. Many miſtake a profeſſion of religion for a work of converſion, and an out-ſide reformation for a ſure ſign of inward regeneration. If the out-ſide of the cup be waſhed, then they think all is clean, tho' it be never ſo foul within. This is the common rock that many ſouls ſplit upon to their eternal hazard, taking up a form of godlineſs, but denying the power thereof, 2 Tim. iii 5.

5. Want of a home application of the law of God to the heart, and conſcience to diſcover to a man the true ſtate and condition he is in.

Where this is wanting, a man will ſit down ſhort of a true work of grace, and will reckon his caſe better than it is. That is a notable paſſage which the apoſtle hints concerning himſelf, *I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, ſin revived, and I died*, Rom. vii 9. Here you have an account of the different apprehenſions Paul had of his condition, with and without the word.

1. Here is his apprehenſion of his condition without the word; *I was alive*, ſaith he, *without the law*. Paul had the law, for he was a Phariſee; and they had the form of knowledge, and of the truth of the law: therefore when he

saith, he was without the law, you must not take him literally, but spiritually; he was without the power and efficacy of it upon his heart and conscience, convincing and awakning, and discovering sin; and so long as this was his case, he doubted not of his state, he was confident of the goodness of his condition: this he hinted, when he saith, *I was alive.* But then,

2. Here is his apprehension of his condition with the word, and that is quite contrary to what it was before: *When the commandment came,* saith he, *then sin revived, and I died.*

When the word of the Lord came with power upon his soul, when the Spirit of God set it home effectually upon the conscience, that is meant by the coming of the commandment; *Then sin revived, and I died.* That is, I saw the desperateness of my case, and the filthiness of all my self-righteousness. Then my hope ceased, and my confidence failed; and as before I thought myself alive, and my sin dead; so when God had awakened conscience by the word, then I saw my sin alive and powerful, and myself dead and miserable. So that this is the first reason why men go no farther in the profession of religion, than to be almost Christians:

Reas. 1. It is because they mistake their state, and think it good when it is not. Which mistake hath a five-fold rise:

1. A deceitful heart.
2. A proud spirit.
3. Taking common grace for saving.

4. Outward reformation for true regeneration.

5. Want of a home-application of the law of God to the heart and conscience.

Reas. 2. It is from Satan's cunning; who if he cannot keep sinners in their open profaneness, then he labours to persuade them to take up with a form of godliness. If he cannot entice them on in their lusts, with a total neglect of heaven; then he entices them to such a profession as is sure to fall short of heaven; he will consent to the leaving some sin, so as we do but keep the rest; and to the doing some duties, so as we neglect the rest: Nay, rather than part with his interest in the soul, he will yield far to our profession of religion, and consent to any thing but our conversion, and closing with Christ for salvation: he cares not which way we come to hell, so as he gets us but thither at last.

Reas. 3. It is from worldly and carnal policy: This is a great hinderance to many. Policy many times enters caveats against piety; Jehu will not part with his calves, lest he hazard his kingdoms. Among many men there would be more zeal and honesty, were there less design and policy. There is an honest policy that helps religion, but carnal policy hinders it.

We are commanded to be wise as serpents Matth. x. 16 Now the serpent is the subtilest of creatures, Gen. iii. 1. But then, we must be innocent as doves: If piety be without policy it wants security; if policy be without piety it wants integrity: Piety without policy, is too

mple to be safe; and policy without piety, is oo subtile to be good.

Let men be as wise, as prudent, as subtile, as vatchful as they will, but then, let it be in the vay of God, let it be joined with holiness and ntegrity.

That is a cursed wisdom that forbids a man o launch any further out in the depth of religion, than he can see the land, lest he be taken n a storm, before he can make safe to shore gain.

Reas 4. There is some lust espoused in the eart, that hinders a hearty close with Christ: Tho' they bid fair, yet they come not to God's erms: The young man would have eternal life, Mat. xix. 20 and he bids fair for it, a willing obedience to every command but one; but only one, and will not God abate him one? is he so severe? will he not come down a little in his erms, when man rises so high? must man yield ll? will God yield nothing?

No, my brethren, he that underbids for heaven, shall as surely lose it, as he that will give nothing for it: He that will not give all he hath, part with all for the pearl of price, Matth. xiii. 45, 46. shall as surely go without it, as he that never once cheapens it.

The not coming up to God's terms, is the ruin of thousands of souls; nay, it is that upon which all that perish, do perish: A naked sinner to a naked Christ, a bleeding broken sinner to a bleeding broken Christ; these are God's

terms.

Most persons are like iron between two equal load-stones; God draws, and they propend towards God; and the world draws, and they incline to the world; they are between both; they would not leave God for the world, if they might not be engaged to leave the world for God.

But if they must part with all, with every lust, every darling, every beloved sin, why then the spirit of Demas possesses them, and God is forsaken by them, 2 Tim. iv. 10.

My brethren, this is the great reason why many that are come to be almost Christians, go no farther; some one beloved lust or other hinders them, and after a long and high profession, parts them and Christ for ever: They did run well, Gal. v 7. But here it is that they give out, and after all fall short, and perish to eternity.

Thus, having answered these four questions, viz.

1. How far a man may go in the way to heaven, and yet be but almost a Christian?

2. Whence it is, that a man goeth so far, as to be almost a Christian?

3. Whence it is, that a man is but almost a Christian, when he hath gone thus far?

4. What is the reason men go no farther in religion, than to be almost Christians?

I proceed now to the application.

1. That salvation is not so easy a thing, as it

is imagined to be: This is attested by our Lord Christ himself. Matth. vii 14. *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* The gate of conversion is a very strait gate, and yet every man that would be saved eternally, must enter in at this strait gate; for salvation is impossible without it. *Except a man be born again* (born from above), *he cannot see the kingdom of God*, John iii. 3.

Not that this gate is strait simply, and in respect of itself; no, for converting grace is free, the gate of mercy stands open all the day long: In the tenders of gospel-grace, none are excluded, unless they exclude themselves, Mat xxii. 3. 5 Acts xiii 46 Christ doth not say, If such and such will come to Me, I will not cast them out; but, *Him that cometh unto me*, (be he who, or what he will, if he have a heart to close with me) *I will in no wise cast him out*, John vi 37. He saith not, If this or that man will, here is water of life for him; but, *If any man will, let him take the water of life freely*, Rev. xxii. 17. Christ grudgeth mercy to none; tho' salvation was dearly purchased for us, yet it is freely proffered to us.

So that the gate which leadeth to life, is not strait on Christ's part, or in respect of itself; but it is strait in respect of us, because of our lusts and corruptions, which make the entrance difficult: A needle's eye is big enough for a thread to pass through, but it is a strait passage for a cable-rope; either the needle's eye must be en-

larged, or the cable-rope must be untwisted, or the entrance is impossible. So it is in this case, the gate of conversion is a very strait passage for a carnal corrupt sinner to go in at? The soul can never pass through, with any one lust beloved and espoused, and therefore the sinner must be untwisted from every lust; he must lay aside the love of every sin, or he can never enter in at this gate, for it is a strait gate; and when he is in at the strait gate, he meeteth with a narrow walk in: So our Lord Christ saith, *Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life;* what way is this, but the way of sanctification? *For without holiness, no man shall ever see the Lord,* Heb. xii. 14.

Now this way of sanctification is a very narrow way; for it lies over the neck of every lust, and in the exercise of every grace, subduing the one, and improving the other; dying daily, and yet living daily; dying to sin, and living to God, this is the way of sanctification: And, O! how few are there who walk in this way? the broad way hath many travellers in it, but this narrow way is like the ways of Canaan, in the days of Shamgar: It is said, Judges v. 6 *In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, the high-ways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through bye-ways:* in the Hebrew it is, [*Achavoth gnakal keloth*] *through crooked ways.* The way of holiness is by the most an unoccupied way; so saith the prophet, Isa. liii. 8, 9 "A way shall be "there, and it shall be called the way of holi-"ness; the unclean shall not pass over it: no

"lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall "go up thereon, but the redeemed shall walk "there." The unclean, and the lion, and the ravenous beast, they are in the crooked ways: None but the redeemed of the Lord, walk in the way of the Lord.

It is no wonder then, that our Lord Christ saith of life, that few there be that find it, when as the gate is strait, and the way narrow, that leadeth to it: Many pretend to walk in the narrow way, but they never entred in at the strait gate; and many pretend to have entred in at the strait gate, but they walk not in the narrow way. *Ad cæleste regnum pauci deducuntur.*

It is a very common thing, for a man to perish upon a mistake of his way, to go on in those paths that take hold of hell, and yet hope to find heaven at last: Those twenty paths fore-mentioned run into destruction, and yet many choose them, and walk in them as the way of salvation. As many profane and open sinners perish by choosing the way of death, so many formal professors perish by mistaking the way of life; this I gather from that our Lord Christ saith, *Few there be that find it;* which doth clearly imply, what in Luke xiii. 24. he doth plainly express, *viz.* that many seek it, many seek to enter in, and yet are not able; many run far, and yet run not so far as to obtain; many bid fair for the pearl of price, and yet go without it: Hell is had with ease, but the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, Mat. xi. 12. *Facilius descensus Averni; sed re-*

vocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras, hic labor hoc opus est.

2. If many go thus far in the way to heaven, and yet miscarry; O then! what shall be the end of them who fall short of these? If he shall perish who is almost a Christian, what shall he do who is not at all a Christian? If he that owneth Christ, and professeth Christ, and leaveth many sins for Christ, may be damned notwithstanding: what then shall his doom be, who disowneth Christ, and refuseth to part with one sin, one lust, one oath for Christ; nay, that openly blasphemeth the precious name of Christ? If he that is outwardly sanctified, shall yet be eternally rejected, what will be the case of such as are openly unsanctified, that have not only the plague of an hard heart within, but also the plague-sores of a profane life without? If the formal professor must be shut out, surely then the filthy adulterer, swinish drunkard, cheap swearer, the profane Sabbath-breaker, the foul-mouthed scoffer, yea, and every carnal sinner much more? If there be a wo to him that falleth short of heaven, then how sad is the wo to him, that falls short of them that fall short of heaven? Ah! that God would make this an awakening word to sinners, that are asleep in sin, without the least fear of death. or dread of damnation.

Are there many in the world that are almost, and yet but almost Christians? Why then, it is time for us to call our own condition into question, and to make a more narrow scrutiny into

the truth of our spiritual estate, what it is, whether it be right or not; whether we are sound and sincere in our profession of religion or not? When our Lord Christ told his disciples, *One of you shall betray me*, every one began presently to reflect upon himself, *Master. Is it I? Master, Is it I?* So should we do, when the Lord discovers to us from his word, how many there are under the profession of religion, that are but almost Christians, we should straightway reflect upon our heart, *Lord, Is it I?* Is my heart unsound? Am I but almost a Christian? Am I one of them that shall miscarry at last? Am I an hypocrite under a profession of religion? Have I a form of godliness without the power?

There are two questions of very great importance, which we should every one of us often put to ourselves.

What am I? Where am I?

1. What am I? Am I a child of God or not? Am I sincere in religion, or am I only an hypocrite under a profession?

2. Where am I? Am I yet in a natural state, or in a state of grace? Am I yet in the old root, in old Adam, or am I in the root Christ Jesus? Am I in the covenant of works, that ministers only wrath and death? or am I in the covenant of grace, that ministers life and peace?

Indeed this is the first thing a man should look at: There must be a change of state, before there can be a change of heart; we must come under a change of covenant, before we can be

under a change of condition; for the new heart and the new spirit is promised in the new covenant; there is nothing of that to be heard of in the old. Now a man must be under the new covenant, Ez. xxxvi. 36. before he can receive the blessing promised in the new covenant: He must be in a new-covenant state, before he can receive a new covenant heart; no mercy, no pardon, no change, no conversion, no grace dispensed out of the covenant, therefore this should be our great enquiry; for if we know not where we are, we cannot know what we are; and if we know not what we are, we cannot be what we should be, viz. altogether Christians. Let me then, I beseech you, press this duty upon you that are professors, *Try your own hearts, examine yourselves whether you are in the faith, prove your own souls*, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. I urge this upon most cogent arguments.

1. Because many rest in a notion of godliness, and outward shows of religion, and yet remain in their natural condition: Many are hearers of the word, but not doers of it, and so deceive their own souls, James i. 22. Some neither hear nor do, these are profane sinners; some both hear and do, these are true believers; some hear, but these do not do, these are hypocritical professors.

He that slights the ordinances, cannot be a true Christian; but yet it is possible a man may own them, and profess them, and yet be no true Christian: Who would trust to a profession, that

hall see Judas a disciple, an apostle, a preacher of the gospel, one that casts out devils, to be cast out himself? "He is not a Jew which is one "outwardly; neither is that circumcision which "is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which "is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of "the heart, in the spirit, and not the letter, "whose praise is not of men, but of God," Rom. ii. 28 29.

2. Because errors in the first foundation are very dangerous: If we be not right in the main, in the fundamental work; if the foundation be not laid in grace in the heart, all our following profession comes to nothing; the house is built upon a sandy foundation, and tho' it may stand for a while, yet when the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon it, great will be the fall of it, Matth. vii. 17.

3. Because many are the deceits that our souls are liable to in this case: There are many things like grace, that are not grace. Now it is the likeness and similitude of things that deceives and makes one thing to be taken for another: *In similibus facilis est deceptio.*

Many take gifts for grace, common knowledge for saving knowledge; whenas a man may have great gifts, and yet no grace; great knowledge, and yet not know Jesus Christ.

Some take common faith for saving; whenas a man may believe all the truths of the gospel, all the promises, all the threatnings, all the articles of the Creed to be true, and yet perish

for want of saving faith.

Some take morality and restraining grace, for piety and renewing grace; whenas it is common to have sin much restrained, where the heart is not at all renewed.

Some are deceived with a half-work, taking conviction for conversion, reformation for regeneration: We have many Mermaid Christians.

Desinit in piscem mulier formosa superna.

Or like Nebuchadnezzar's image, the head of gold, and feet of clay, Dan. ii. 32, 33 The devil cheats most men by a *synecdoche*, putting a part for the whole; partial obedience to some commands, for universal obedience to all. Endless are the delusions that Satan fastens upon souls, for want of this self-search: It is necessary therefore that we try our state, lest we take the shadow for the substance, and embrace a cloud instead of Juno.

4. Satan will try us at one time or other; he will winnow and sift us to the bottom, Luke xii. 13. And if we now rest in a groundless confidence, we will then end in a comfortless despair. Nay God himself will search and try us at the day of judgment especially; and who can abide that trial, that never tries his own heart?

5. Whatsoever a man's state be, whether he be altogether a Christian or no; whether his principles be sound or no, yet it is good to examine his own heart, Gal. vi. 4. If he find his heart good, his principles right and sound, this will be matter of rejoicing; if he find his heart

rotten, his principles false and unsound, the discovery is in order to a renewing; if a man have a disease upon him, and know it, he may send to the physician in time; but what a sad vexation will it be, not to see a disease till it be past cure? So, for a man to be graceless, and not see it till it be too late, to think himself a Christian when he is not, and that he is in the right way to heaven, when he is in the ready way to hell, and yet not know it till a death-bed, or a judgment-day confute his confidence; this is the most irrecoverable misery.

These are the grounds upon which I press this duty of examining our state; O! that God would help us, in the doing this necessary duty.

Quest. You will say, But how shall I come to know whether I am almost, or altogether a Christian? If a man may go so far, and yet miscarry, how shall I know when my foundation is right, when I am a Christian indeed?

Ans. 1. The altogether-Christian closes with, and accepts of Christ upon gospel-terms. True union makes a true Christian: Many close with Christ, but it is upon their own terms; they take him, and own him, but not as God offers him. The terms upon which God in the gospel offers Christ are, that we shall accept of a broken Christ with a broken heart, and yet a whole Christ with a whole heart.

A broken Christ with a broken heart, as a witness of our humility; a whole Christ with the whole heart, as a witness of our sincerity. A

broken Christ respects his suffering for sin, a broken heart respects our sense of sin: a whole Christ includes all his offices. a whole heart includes all our faculties. Christ is a king, priest, and prophet, and all as Mediator; without any one of these offices, the work of salvation could not have been compleated. As a priest, he redeems us; as a prophet, he instructs us; as a king, he sanctifies and saves us: Therefore the apostle saith, 1 Cor. i. 30: *He is made of God unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.* Righteousness and redemption flow from him as a priest; wisdom as a prophet, sanctification as a king.

Now many embrace Christ as a priest, but yet they own him not as a king and prophet; they like to share in his righteousness, but not to partake of his holiness; they would be redeemed by him, but they would not submit to him; they would be saved by his blood, but not submit to his power. Many love the privileges of the gospel, but not the duties of the gospel. Now these are but almost Christians, notwithstanding their close with Christ; for it is upon their own terms, but not upon God's. The offices of Christ may be distinguished, but they can never be divided.

But the true Christian owns Christ in all his offices; he doth not only close with him as Jesus, but as Lord Jesus; he saith with Thomas, *My Lord, and my God,* John xx. 28. He doth not only believe in the merits of his death, but also

conforms to the manner of his life: As he believes in him, so he lives to him: He takes him for his wisdom as well as for his-righteousness; for his-sanctification as well as his redemption.

2. The altogether Christian hath a thorough work of grace and sanctification wrought in the heart, as a spring of duties. Regeneration is a whole change: All old things are done away, and all things become new, 2 Cor. v. 11. It is a perfect work as to parts, tho' not as to degrees. Carnal men do duties, but they are from an unsanctified heart, and that spoils all. A new piece of cloth never doth well in an old garment, for the rent is but made worse, Matth. ix. 16. When a man's heart is thoroughly renewed by grace, the mind savingly enlightned, the conscience thoroughly convinced, the will truly humbled and subdued, the affections spiritually raised and sanctified; and when mind and will, and conscience and affections, all join issue to help on with the performance of the duties commanded, then is a man altogether a Christian.

3. He that is altogether a Christian, looks to the manner, as well as the matter of his duties; not only that they be done, but how they be done. He knows the Christian's privileges ly in pronouns, but his duty in adverbs; it must not be only *bonum*, good, but it must be *bene*, that good must be rightly done.

Here the almost Christian fails; he doth

the same duties that others do for the matter, but he doth them not in the same manner: while he minds the substance, he regards not the circumstance: If he pray, he regards not faith and fervency in prayer, James v. 16. If he hear, he doth not mind Christ's rule, *Take heed how you hear*, Luke viii. 18. If he obeys, he looks not to the frame of his heart, (Rom. vi. 17.) in obeying; and therefore miscarries in all he doth: *bonum oritur ex integra causa, malum ex quolibet defectu;* any of these defects spoil the good of every duty.

4. The altogether Christian is known by his sincerity in all his performances. Whatever a man doth in the duties of the gospel, he cannot be a Christian without sincerity. Now the almost Christian fails in this, for tho' he doth much, prays much, hears much, obeys much, yet he is an hypocrite under all.

5. He that is altogether a Christian, hath an answerableness within to the law without. There is a co-naturalness between the word of God and the will of a Christian: his heart is, as it were, the transcript of the law: the same holiness that is commanded in the word, is implanted in his heart: the same conformity to Christ that is enjoined by the word of God, is wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God: the same obedience which the word requireth of him, the Lord enableth to perform by his grace bestowed on him. This is that which is promised in the New Covenant, *I will put my*

w in their inward parts, and write it in their arts, Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. ix. 10. and x. 16. ow the writing his law in us, is nothing else t his working that grace and holiness in us hich the law commandeth and requireth of us. In the old covenant administration, God rote his laws only upon tables of stone, but t upon the heart; and therefore tho' God rote them, yet they broke them; but in the w covenant administration, God provides w tables, not tables of stone, but fleshly les of the heart, 2 Cor. iii. 3. and writes laws there, that there might be a law within swerable to the law without, and this every ne Christian hath; so that he may say, in his asure, as our Lord Christ did, *I delight to do will, O my God: thy law is in my heart*, lm xl. 8. Every believer hath a light with- him, not guiding him to despise and slight, t to prize and walk by the light without him: e word commands him to walk in the light, l the light directs him to walk according the word.

Moreover, from this impression of the law on the heart, obedience and conformity to d, becomes the choice and delight of the l; for holiness is the very nature of the w creature: So that if there were no Scrip- re, no Bible, to guide him, yet he would be y; for he hath received grace for grace: re is a grace within to answer to the word grace without, John i. 16.

Now, the almost Christian, is a stranger t this law of God within; he may have som conformity to the word, in outward converst tion, but he cannot have his answerablenes t the word in inward constitution.

6. The altogether Christian is much in duty and yet much above duty; much in duty i regard of performances; much above duty i regard of dependance; much in duty by obey ing, but much above duty by believing. H lives in his obedience, but he doth not liv upon his obedience, but upon Christ, and h righteousnes.

The almost Christian fails in this: he much in duty, but not above it, but rests in i he works for rest, and he rests in his work he cannot come to believe and obey too; if believes, then he thinks there is no need obedience, and so casts off that: if he be mu in obedience, than he casts off believing, a thinks there is no need of that; he cannot s with David, *I have hoped for thy salvatio and done thy commandments*, Psal. cxix. 166.

The more a man is in duty, and the mo above it, the more in doing, and more in b lieving, the more a Christian.

7. He that is altogether a Christian, is u versal in his obedience; he doth not obey o command and neglect another; do one du and cast off another; but he hath respect to the commands, Psal. cxix. 6. He endeavou to leave every sin, and love every duty.

The almost Christian fails in this; his obedience is partial and piece-meal; if he obeys the command, he breaks another; the duties that least cross his lust, he is much in; but those that do, he lays aside.

The Pharisees fasted, prayed, paid tithes, &c. Matth. xxiii. 23. but they did not lay aside their covetousness, their oppression; they devoured widows houses, they were unnatural to parents, Matth. iii. 14.

§ 8. The altogether Christian makes God's glory the chief end of all his performances: If he prays, or hears, or gives, or fasts, or repents, or obeys, &c. God's glory is the main end of all: It is true, he may have somewhat else at hither end of his work, but God is at the further end: As Moses' rod swallowed up the Magicians rods, so God's glory is the ultimate end that swallows up all his other ends. Now the almost Christian fails in this; his ends are corrupt and selfish: God may possibly be at the hither end of his work, but self is at the further end; for he that was never truly cast out of himself, can have no higher end than himself.

Now then, examine thyself by these characters; put the question to thy own soul, Doest thou close with Christ upon gospel-terms? Is grace in the heart the principle of thy performances? Doest thou look to the manner as well as the matter of thy duties? Doest thou do all in sincerity? Is there an answerableness

within to the law without? Art thou much above duty, when much in duty? Is thy obedience universal? Lastly, Is God's glory the end of all? If so, then art thou not only almost, but altogether a Christian.

O take heed of being almost, and yet but almost a Christian. It is a great complaint of God against Ephraim, Hos. vii. 8. that he is a cake not turned; that is, half-baked; neither raw nor roasted; neither cold nor hot, as Laodicea, Rev. iii. 17. *Because thou art neither hot nor cold, therefore I will spue thee out of my mouth.* This is a condition that of all others is greatly unprofitable, exceedingly uncomfortable, and desperately dangerous.

1. It is greatly unprofitable to be but almost a Christian; for failing in any one point, will ruin us as surely as if we had never made any attempts for heaven. It is no advantage to the soul to be almost converted, for the little that we want spoils the good of all our attainments: We say, As good never a whit; as never the near; *Ad nihilum, valet quod non valet ad finem suum:* There is no profit in leaving this or that sin, unless we leave all sin. *Deus non vult exceptione coli.* Herod heard John gladly, and did many things, but he kept his Herodias, and that ruined him. Judas did many things, prayed much, preached much, professed much; but yet his covetousness spoiled all. One sin ruined the young man, that had kept all the commands but one. Thus

He that offends in one point, is guilty of all, James ii. 20. That is, that lives willingly and allowedly in any one sin, he brings the guilt of the violation of the whole law of God upon his soul, and that on a two-fold account.

1. Because he manifests the same contempt of the authority of God, in the wilful breach of one, as of all.

2. By allowing himself in the breach of any one command, he shows he keeps none in obedience and conscience to God; for he that hates sin as sin, hates all sin; and that obeys the command as the express will of God, obeys every command. And for this cause, the least sin willingly and with allowance lived in, spoils the good of all our obedience, and lays the soul under the whole wrath of God. One leak in a ship may sink her, tho' she be tight everywhere else, Judges viii. 31. 33. compared with chap. ix. 5. Gideon had seventy sons, and but one bastard, and yet that one bastard destroyed all his sons. So may one sin spoil all our services: One lust beloved may spoil all our profession, as that one bastard slew all the sons of Gideon.

2. It is exceedingly uncomfortable, as appears three ways.

1. In that such an one is hated of God and men. The world hates him, because of his profession; and God abhors him, because of his dissimulation: The world hates him, because he seems good; and God hates him, be-

cause he doth but seem so. There is no sort that God hates more, than the almost Christian. *I would thou wert either cold or hot*, Rev. iii. 15. either all a Christian, or not at all a Christian, *Tepida evomere consuevimus, unde ad vomitum ciendum, quidam aquæ tepida sumuntur. Because thou art neither hot nor cold, therefore I will spue thee out of my mouth.* What a lothsome expression doth God here use, to shew what an utter abhorrency there is in him against lukewarm Christians! How uncomfortable then must that condition needs be, wherein a man is abhorred both of God and man?

2. It is uncomfortable in regard of sufferings: for being almost a Christian, will bring us into suffering; but being but almost a Christian, will never carry us through suffering. In Matth. xiii. 20, 21. it is said, "He that re-"ceived the seed into stony-ground, the same "is he that hears the word, and with joy re-"ceiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, "but endureth for a while; for when tribula-"tion or persecution ariseth because of the "word, by and by he is offended."

There are four things observable in the words:

1. That the stony-ground may receive the word with joy.

2. That it may for some time abide in a profession of it; *He endureth for a while.*

3. That this profession will expose to suffering; for mark, persecution is said to arise

because of the word.

4. This suffering will cause an apostatizing from profession; for that which is here called *offence*, is, in Luke viii. 13. called *falling away*, —*Which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

I gather hence, a profession may expose a man as much to suffering, as the power of godliness; but, without the power of godliness, there is no holding out in a profession under suffering. The world hates the show of godliness, and therefore persecutes it: The almost Christian wants the substance, and therefore cannot hold out in it.

Now this must needs be very uncomfortable, if I profess religion, I am like to suffer; if I do but profess it, I am never like to endure.

3. It is uncomfortable in regard of that deceit it lays our hopes under: To be deceived of our hopes, causeth sorrow as well as shame. He that is but almost a Christian, hopes for heaven; but unless he be altogether a Christian, he shall never come there.

Now to perish with hope of heaven, to go to hell by the gates of glory; to come to the very door, and then be shut out, as the five virgins were, Matth. xxv. 10. to die in the wilderness, within sight of the promised land, at the very brink of Jordan, this must needs be sad. To come within a stride of the goal, and miss it; to sink within sight of the harbour, O how uncomfortable is this!

3. As it is unprofitable, and exceedingly uncomfortable to be but almost a Christian; so it is desperately dangerous: For,

1. This doth *obicem ponere*, it hinders the true work; a man lies in a fairer capacity for conversion, that lies in open enmity and rebellion, than he that suits up himself in the formalities of religion. This I gather from that parable of the two sons, which our Lord Christ urged to the professing Scribes and Pharisees, Matth. xxi. 28—32. "There was a man had "two sons, and he came to one, and said, Go "work to-day in my vineyard. He said, I will "not; but afterwards repented, and went. "And he came to the second, and said like-"wise. And he said, I go Sir, but went not." The first represents the carnal open sinner, that is called by the word, but refuses, yet afterwards repents and believes: The second represents the hypocritical professor, that pretends much, but performs little.

Now mark how Christ applies this parable, Verse 31. *Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

And upon this account it is better not to be at all, than to be but almost a Christian; for the almost hinders the altogether. It is better, in this regard, to be a sinner without a profession, than to be a professor without conversion: for the one lies fairer for an inward change, when the other rests in an outward. Our

Lord Christ tells the Scribe, Mark xii. 34. *Thou art not far from the kingdom of God:* and yet never like to come there.

There are none farther from the kingdom of God, than such as are not far from the kingdom of God. As for instance, when there lies but one lust, one sin between a soul and Christ, that soul is not far from Christ; but now when the soul rests in this nearness to Christ, and yet will not part with that one lust for Christ, but thinks his condition secure, tho' that lust be not subdued, who is farther from the kingdom of God than he?

So our Lord Christ tells the young man, Mark x. 21. *One thing thou lackest.* Why, he was very near heaven, near being a Christian altogether, he was almost saved; he tells Christ, he hath kept all the commands, verse 20. He lacked but one thing: I say, but one thing; but it was a great thing: that one thing he lacked, was more than all the things he had, for it was the one thing necessary, Luke x. 42. It was a new heart, a work of grace in his soul, a change of state, a heart weaned from the world: ay, this was the one thing, and he that lacks this one thing, perishes with all things else.

2. This condition is so like a state of grace, that the mistake of it for grace is easy and common: And it is very dangerous to mistake any thing for grace, that is no grace; for in that a man contents himself as if it were grace.

Formality doth often dwell next door to sincerity, and one sign serves both, and so the house may be easily mistaken, and by that means a man may take up his lodging there, and never find the way out again.

What one saith of wisdom, *Multi ad sapientiam pervenissent, nisi se jam pervenisse putassent:* Many might have been wise, had they not thought themselves so, when they were otherwise: The same I may say of grace; many a formal professor might have been a sincere believer, had he not mistook his profession for conversion, his duties for grace; and so rested in that for sincerity, which is but hypocrisy.

3. It is a degree of blasphemy to pretend to grace, and yet have no grace. I gather this from that, Rev. ii. 9. *I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not.* This place undergoes variety of constructions; Grotius and Pareus do not take their blasphemy to lie in their saying they are Jews, and are not; but to lie in the reproaches that these Jews fastened upon Christ, calling him impostor, deceiver, one that hath a devil, &c.

Brightman goes another way, and says This was the blasphemy of these Jews, they retained that way of worship that was abrogated; and thrust upon God those old rites and ceremonies which Jesus Christ had abolished, and nailed to his cross, Col. ii. 14. by which they overthrow the glory of Christ

nd denied his coming.

But I conceive the blasphemy of these Jews to y in this, That they said they were Jews, and were not. A Jew here is not to be taken literally and strictly only, for one of the lineage of Abraham, but it is to be taken metonymically, for a true believer, one of the spiritual seed of Abraham; *He is a Jew who is one inwardly*, Rom. iii. 16 So that for a man to say he is a Jew when he is not, to profess an interest in Christ when he hath none, to say he hath grace when he hath none, this Christ calls blasphemy.

But why should Christ call this blasphemy? this is hypocrisy; but how may it be said to be blasphemy? why, he blasphemes the great attributes of God's omniscience; he doth implicitly deny, that God sees and knows our hearts and thoughts; for if a man did believe the omniscience of God, that he searches the heart, and sees, and knows all within, he would not dare to rest in a graceless profession of godliness; this therefore is blasphemy in the account of Christ.

4. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in that this stills and serves to quiet conscience.—*Bello pax eo deterior.* Now it is very dangerous to quiet conscience, with any thing but the blood of Christ; it is bad being at peace, till Christ speaks peace; nothing can truly pacify conscience, less than that which pacifies God, and that is the blood of the Lord Christ. Now the almost Christian quiets conscience, but not with the blood of Christ; it is not a peace flowing

from Christ's propitiation, but a peace rising from a formal profession; not a peace of Christ's giving, but a peace of his own making; he silences and bridles conscience with a form of godliness and so makes it give way to an undoing soul destroying peace; he rocks it asleeps in the cradle of duties, and then it is a thousand to one, it never awaketh more till death or judgment.

Ah! my brethren, it is better to have conscience never quiet, than quieted any way but by the blood of sprinkling: A good conscience unquiet, is the greatest affliction to saints; and an evil conscience quiet, is the greatest judgment to sinners.

5. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in respect of the unpardonable sin; the sin that the scripture saith, can never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come, Matth. xii. 32. I mean the sin against the Holy Ghost: Now such are only capable of sinning that sin, as are but almost Christians.

A true believer cannot; the work of grace in his heart, the seed of God abiding in him, secures him against it, 1 John iii. 9. compared with chap v. 16, 17, 18.

The profane, ignorant, open sinner cannot, tho' he lives daily and hourly in sin, yet he cannot commit this sin; for it must be from an enlightned mind; every sinner under the gospel especially, sins sadly against the Holy Ghost, against the strivings and motions of the Spirit; He resists the Holy Ghost, but yet this is not the

n against the Holy Ghost, Acts vii 51.

There must be three ingredients to make up hat sin.

1 It must be wilful, Heb. x. 26 "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin"

2. It must be against light and convictions, fter we have received the knowledge of the ruth

3. It must be *destinata malitia*, in resolved malice. *Blasphemia in Spiritum sanctum ea est, qua quis destinata malitia contra proprium animi sui, sensum Spiritus sancti gratiam et virtutem, Deique gloriam oppugnat*, Luc. Brug. in Mat. xii. Now you shall find all these ingredients into the sin of the Pharisees. Mat. xii. 22. Christ heals one that was possessed with a devil; a great work which all the people wondred at, ver 23. But what say the Pharisees, see ver. 4. *This fellow casteth out devils by the prince of devils*: Now, that this was the sin against the Holy Ghost, is clear; for it was both wilful and malicious, and against clear convictions; they could not but see he was the Son of God, and that this work was a peculiar work of the Spirit of God in him, and yet they say he wrought by the devil; whereupon Christ charges them with this sin against the Holy Ghost, ver. 31, 33. compare this with Mark iii. 28, 29, 33. Now these Pharisees were a sort of great professors; whence I gather this conclusion, That it is the professor of religion,

that is the subject of this sin, not the open carnal sinner, not the true believer, but the formal professor.

Not the sinner, for he hath neither light nor grace; not the believer, for he hath both light and grace; therefore the formal professor, for he hath light, but no grace. Here then is the greatest danger of being but almost a Christian, he is liable to this dreadful, unpardonable sin.

6. This being but almost a Christian, subjects us to apostacy; he that gets no good by walking in the ways of God, will quickly leave them, and walk no more in them: This I gather from Hosea xiv. 9. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein."

The just shall walk in them: He whose heart is renewed, and made right with God, he shall keep close to God in his ways

But the transgressor shall fall therein. The word in the Hebrew is [*Peshangim*] from a word that signifies to prevaricate; so that we may read the word thus, The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but he that prevaricates (*i. e.* a hypocrite) in the ways of God, he shall fall therein.

An unsound heart will never hold out long in the ways of God, John v. 35. "He was a burning and shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in that light."

For a season, for an hour, a short space, and hen they left him It is a notable question Job puts concerning the hypocrite, "Will he delight 'in the Almighty? will he always call upon 'God?" Job xxvii. 10.

He may do much, but these two things he cannot do.

He cannot make God his delight.

He cannot persevere in duties at all times, and n all conditions.

He will be an apostate at last; the scab of hypocrisy usually breaks out in the plague-sore of apostacy. Conversion ground is standing ground, it is *terra firma;* but a graceless profession of religion is a slippery ground, and falling ground. Julian the apostate, was first Julian the professor. I know it is possible, a believer may fall, but yet he rises again, the everlasting arms are underneath, Prov. xxiv. 26. Deut. xxxiii. 27. But when the hypocrite falls, who shall help him up?

Solomon saith, *Wo to him that is alone when he falls*, Eccles. iv. 10. that is, without interest in Christ: Why woe to him? For he hath none to help him up. If Jesus Christ do not recover him, who can? David fell, and was restored, for he had one to help him up; but Judas fell, and perished, for he was alone.

7. This being but almost a Christian, provokes God to bring dreadful spiritual judgments upon a man.

Barrenness is a spiritual judgment: Now this

provokes God to give us up to Barrenness. When Christ found the fig-tree had leaves, but no fruit, he pronounces the curse of barrenness upon it, Mat xxi 19 "Never fruit grow on thee more:" And so Ezek. xvii. 11. "The miry "places thereof, and the marishy places there-"of, shall not be healed, they shall be given to "salt."

A spirit of delusion is a sad judgment; why? This is the almost Christian's judgment, that receives the truth, but not in the love of it: "Because they received not the love of the "truth, that they might be saved; for this "cause God shall send them strong delusions," 2 Thess ii 10. 11, 12.

To lose either light, or sight; either ordinances, or eyes, is a great spiritual judgment: why? This is the almost Christian's judgment. He that profits not under the means, provoke God to take away either their light, or sight, either the ordinances from before his eyes, or else to blind his eyes under the ordinances, Luke xix. 42.

To have a hard heart, is a dreadful judgment: and there is no hypocrite, but he hath an hard heart

My brethren, it is a dreadful thing for God to give a man up to spiritual judgment.

Now this being almost a Christian, provoke God to give a man up to spiritual judgment: surely therefore it is a very dangerous thing to be almost a Christian,

8. Being almost, and but almost a Christian, will exceedingly aggravate our damnation. The higher a man rises under the means, the lower he falls if he miscarries. He that falls but a little short of heaven, will fall deepest into hell: He that hath been nearest to conversion, being not converted, shall have the deepest damnation when he is judged. Capernaum's sentence shall exceed Sodom's for severity, Mat. xi 23, 24 because she exceeded Sodom in the enjoyment of mercy; she received more from God, she knew more of God, she professed more for God, and yet was not right with God; therefore she shall be punished more by God. The higher the rise, the greater the fall; the higher the profession, the lower the damnation; he miscarrieth with a light in his hand; he perisheth under many convictions; and convictions never end but in a sound conversion, as in all saints, or in a sad damnation as in all hypocrites. Praying ground, hearing ground, professing ground, is of all the worst ground to perish upon.

Now then, to sum up all under this head,

If to be almost a Christian hinders the true work of conversion; if it be easily mistaken for conversion; if it be a degree of blasphemy; if this be that which quiets conscience; if this subjects a man to commit the unpardonable sin; if it lays us liable to apostacy; if it provokes God to give us up to spiritual judgments; and if it be that which exceedingly aggravates our damnation: Sure then, it is a very dangerous thing, to

be almost, and but almost a Christian.

O! labour to be altogether Christians, to go farther than they who have gone farthest, and yet fall short; this is the great counsel of the Holy Ghost, *So run, that you may obtain*, 1 Cor. ix 24. *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure*, 2 Pet. i. 10.

Need you any motives to quicken you up to this important duty?

1. Consider, This is that which is not only commanded by God, but that whereunto all the commands of God tend: A perfect conformity of heart and life to God, is the sum and substance of all the commands, both of the Old and New Testaments. As the harlot was for the dividing the child, 1 Kings iii. 16, 17. So is Satan for dividing the heart; he would have our love and affections shared between Christ and our lust; for he knows that Christ reckons we love him not all, unless we love him above all. God will have all or none. "My son, give me thine heart, "Prov. xxiii. 26. Thou shalt love the Lord "thy God with all thy heart, with all thy "soul, and with all thy might," Deut. vi. 5. Luke xii. 27.

Look into the scripture, and see what that is upon which your *only* stands, and you shall find that God hath fixed it upon these great duties, which alone tend to the perfection of your state as Christians. God hath fixed your *only* upon believing, Mark v. 36. *Only believe.*

God hath fixed your *only* upon obedience,

Mat iv. 10. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy "God, and him *only* shalt thou serve. Philip. "i. 27. *Only* let your conversation be, as be-"cometh the gospel of Christ" So that your *only* is fixed by God, upon those two great du-ies of believing and obeying, both which tend to the perfection of your state as Christians.

Now shall God command, and shall not we obey? Can there be an higher motive to duty, than the authority of the great God, whose will is the eternal rule of righteousness? O let us fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the *totum hominum* the whole duty of man, so we read it.

2. Consider, The Lord Christ is a Saviour throughout, a perfect and compleat Mediator: He hath not shed his blood by halves, nor satisfied the justice of God by halves, and redeemed sinners by halves: No, but he went through with his undertaking, he bore all our sins, and he shed all his blood, he died to the outmost, satisfied the justice of God to the outmost, redeemed sinners to the outmost; and now that he is in heaven, he intercedeth to the outmost, and is able to save to the outmost. Heb vii 25.

It is observed that our Lord Christ when he was upon the earth in the days of his flesh, he wrought no *semiplenam curationem*, no half cures, but whomsoever they brought to him for healing, he healed them throughout. Matth. xiv. 35, 36. "They brought unto him all that "were diseased, and besought him that they "36

"might only touch the hem of his garment; "and as many as touched, were made perfectly "whole."

O! what an excellent physician is here? none like him: He cureth infallibly, suddenly, perfectly.

He cureth infallibly; none ever came to him for healing that went without it; he never practised upon any that miscarried under his hand.

He cureth suddenly; no sooner is his garment touched, but his patient is healed, Matth. i. 31 and xii. 2. Luke viii. 41. The leper, Mat. viii. 3. is no sooner touched, but immediately cured; the two blind men, Matth. xx. 34. are no sooner touched, but their eyes are immediately opened.

He cureth perfectly; *As many as were touched, were made perfectly whole*, Mat. xiv. 17.

Now all this was to show, what a perfect and compleat Saviour Jesus Christ would be, to all sinners that would but come to him. They should find healing in his blood, virtue in his righteousness, and pardon for all their sins, whatever they were: Look as Christ healed all the diseases, of all that came to him when he was on earth, so he pardons all the sins, and healeth all the wounds of all those souls that come to him, now he is in heaven.

He is a Saviour throughout, and shall not we be saints throughout? Shall he be altogether a Redeemer, and shall not we be altogether believers? O what shame is this?

3. There is enough in religion to engage us to be altogether Christians, and that whether we respect profit or comfort, for grace brings both.

Confid. 3. *First*, Religion is a gainful thing; and this is *argumentum cogens*, a compelling motive, that becomes effectual upon all; gain is the god whom the world worships; what will not men do? what will they not suffer for gain? what journeys do many take by land? what voyages by sea, through hot and cold, through fair and foul, through storm and shine, through day and night, and all for gain?

Now there is no calling so gainful, as this of religion, it is the most profitable employment we take up: *Godliness is profitable unto all things*, 1 Tim. iv. 8. It is a great revenue, if it be closely followed, it brings in the greatest income: Indeed some men are religious for the world's sake, such shall be sure not to gain; but they who are religious for religions sake, shall be sure not to lose, if heaven and earth can recompense them; for, *Godliness hath the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*, 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Ah! who would not be a Christian, when the gain of godliness is so great? Many gain much in their worldly calling, but the profit which the true believer hath, from one hour's communion with God and Christ, weigheth down all the gain of the world: Cursed be that man who counts all the gain of the world, with one hour's com-

munion with Jesus Christ, saith that noble Marquiss, Galeatius Carracciola. It is no where said in scripture, Happy is the man that findeth silver, and the man that getteth fine gold; these are of no weight in the balance of the sanctuary: but it is said, "Happy is the man that findeth "wisdom, and the man that getteth understand "ing; for the merchandise of it is better than "the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold," Prov. iii. 13, 14.

By wisdom and understanding here, we are to understand the grace of Christ, and so the Spirit of God interpreteth it, Job xxviii. 28. *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.*

Now of all merchants, he that trades in this wisdom and understanding, will prove the richest man; one grain of godliness outweigheth all the gold of Ophir: There is no riches like being rich in grace: For,

1. This is the most necessary riches: Other things are not so; silver and gold are not so: we may be, and be happy without them: There is but one thing necessary, and that is the grace of Jesus Christ in the heart; have this, and have all; want this, and want all.

2. It is the most substantial gain. The things of this world are more shadow than substance: pleasure, honour, and profit, comprehend all things in this world; and therefore are the carnal man's trinity.

Ambitiosus honos, et opes, et sæda voluptas,
Hæc tria pro trino nomine mundus habet.

The apostle John calls them, The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life: *This*, saith he, *is all that is in the world*, 1 John ii. 9. And truly, if this be all, all is nothing; for what is pleasure, but a dream and conceit? What is honour, but fancy and opinion? And what is profit, but a thing of nought? *Why wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?* Prov. xxiii. 5. The things of the world have in them no solid subsistence, though foolish carnal men call them substance.

But now grace is a substantial good; so our Lord Christ calls it, Prov. viii 21. *That I may cause those that love me, to inherit substance;* to inherit that which is. Grace is a reality, other things are but show and fancy.

3. Godliness is the safest gain. The gain of worldly things is always with difficulty, but seldom with safety. The soul is often hazarded in the over-eager pursuit of worldly things; nay, thousands do pawn, and lose, and damn their precious souls eternally for a little silver or gold, which are but the guts and garbage of the earth, Mat. xvi. 26. *And what is a man profited to gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul?*

But the gain of godliness is ever with safety to the soul; nay, the soul is lost and undone without it; and not saved, but by the attainment of it. A soul without grace, is in a lost and perishing condition. The hazard of eternity is ne-

ver over with us, until the grace of Christ Jesus be sought by us, and wrought in us.

4. Godliness is the surest profit. 1 Tim. vi 17. As it is safe, so it is sure: Men make great ventures for the world, but all runs upon uncertainties; many venture much, and wait long, and yet find no return, but disappointment; they sow much, and yet reap nothing.

But the gain of godliness is sure, Prov. xi. 18. *To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.* And as the things of the world are uncertain in the getting, so they are uncertain in the keeping.

Non minor est virtus quam quærere parta tueri.

If men do not undo us, moths may; if robbers do not, rust may; if rust doth not, fire may; to which all earthly treasures are incident, as our Lord Christ teacheth us Matth. vi. 19. Solomon limneth the world with wings, Prov. xxiii. 5. *Riches take unto themselves wings, and fly as an eagle towards heaven.* A man may be rich as Dives to-day, and yet poor as Lazarus to-morrow: O! how uncertain are all worldly things?

But now the true treasure of grace in the heart, that can never be lost, it is out of the reach both of rust and robber. He that gets the world, gets a good he can never keep; but he that gets grace, gets a good he shall never lose.

5 *The profit of godliness lieth not only in this world, but in the world to come,* 1 Tim. iv. 8. All other profit lieth in this world only; riches

and honours, &c. are called this world's goods, 1 John iii. 17. but the riches of godliness are chiefly in the other world's goods, in the enjoyment of God and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, among saints and angels in glory: Lo, this is the gain of godliness: *Such honour have all his saints*, Psal. cxlix. 9.

6. The gain of godliness is a durable and eternal gain. All this world's goods are perishing; perishing pleasures, perishing honours, perishing profits, perishing comforts: *Riches are not for ever*: *Hast thou entred into the treasures of the snow?* Job xxxviii. 22 Gregory upon these words observes, that earthly treasures are treasures of snow: What pains do children take to scrape and ruse the snow together, to make a snow-ball, which is no sooner done, but the heat of the sun dissolves it, and it comes to nothing? Why, the treasures of the world are but treasures of snow; when death and judgment come, they melt away, and come to nothing. *Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death*, Prov. xi 4.

You see here the great advantage of godliness; so that if we look at profit, we shall find enough in religion, to engage us to be altogether Christians.

2. If we look at comfort Religion is the most comfortable profession. There are no comforts to be compared to the comforts of grace and godliness.

1. Worldly comfort is only outward, it is but

skin-deep: *In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful*, Prov. xiv. 23. But now the comfort that flows from godliness, is an inward comfort, a spiritual joy; therefore it is called gladness of heart, Psal. iv. 7. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart.* Other joys smooths the brow, but this fills the breast.

2. Worldly comfort hath a nether-spring. The spring of worldly comfort is the creature, in some earthly enjoyment; and therefore the comfort of worldly men must needs be mixed and muddy: *An unclean fountain cannot send forth pure water*, James iii 21. But spiritual comfort hath an upper-spring: The comfort that accompanies godliness, flows from the manifestations of the love of God in Christ, from the workings of the blessed Spirit in the heart, which is first a counsellor, and then a comforter; and therefore the comforts of the saints must needs be pure and unmixed comforts, for they flow from a pure spring.

3. Worldly comfort is very fading and transitory. *The triumphing of the wicked is but short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment*, Job xx 5 Solomon compares it to the cracking of thorns under a pot. Eccl. vii. 6 which is but a blaze, and soon out; so is the comfort of carnal hearts: But now the comfort of godliness is a durable and abiding comfort, *Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you* John xvi. 22.

The comfort of godliness is lasting, and ever-

lasting; it abides by us in life, in death, and after death.

First, It abides by us in life; grace and peace go together. Philip. i. 2. Co. i. 2. Godliness brings forth comfort and peace naturally. *The effect of righteousness shall be peace*, Isa. xxxii. 17. It is said of the primitive Christians, *They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*, Acts ix. 31. Every duty done in uprightness and sincerity, reflects some comfort upon the soul; *In keeping the commands there is great reward*, Psal. cxix. 11. not only for keeping of them, but in the keeping of them; as every flower, so every duty carries sweetness and refreshing with it.

Object. But who more dejected and disconsolate than saints and believers? Whose lives are more uncomfortable? Whose mouths are more filled with complaints than theirs? If a condition of godliness and Christianity be a condition of so much comfort, then why are they thus?

Solut. That the people of God are oftentimes without comfort, that I grant; *They may walk in the dark, and have no light*, Isa. l. 10. But this is none of the product of godliness; grace brings forth no such fruit as this; there is a three-fold rise and spring in it.

Sin within, desertion within, and temptation within.

1. Sin within. The saints of God are not all spirit, and no flesh; all grace, and no sin; they

are made up of contrary principles: There is light and darkness in the same mind, sin and grace in the same will, carnal and spiritual in the same affections; there is the flesh lusting against the Spirit, Gal. v. 17. in all these: And too oft (the Lord knows) is the believer led away captive by these warring lusts: So was the holy apostle himself; *I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.* Rom. vii. 21. 23. And this was that which broke his spiritual peace, and filled his soul with trouble and complaints, as you see, ver. 24. *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

So that it is sin that interrupts the peace of God's people: In-dwelling lust stirring and breaking forth, must needs cause trouble and grief in the soul of a believer; for it is as natural for sin to bring forth trouble, as it is for grace to bring forth peace: Every sin contracts a new guilt upon the soul, and guilt provokes God: And where there is a sense of guilt contracted, and God provoked, there can be no peace, no quiet in the soul, till faith procure fresh sprinklings of the blood of Jesus Christ upon the conscience.

2. Another spring of the believer's trouble and disconsolateness of Spirit, is, the desertion of God; and this follows upon the former, God doth sometimes disappear, Psal. xiii. 1. and hides him-

lf from his people: *Verily thou art a God that dest thyself*, Isa. xlv. 15. But the cause of od's hiding, is the believer's sinning: *Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, nd your sins have hid his face from you*, Isa lix. . In heaven, where this is no sinning, there no losing the light of God's countenance for a oment; and if saints here could serve God without corruption, they should enjoy God without desertion, but this cannot be; while we are n this state, remaining lusts will stir and break orth, and then God will hide his face, and this must needs be trouble: *Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled*, Psal. xxx. 7.

The light of God's countenance shining upon the soul, is the Christian's heaven on this side heaven; and therefore it is no wonder if the hiding of his face be looked upon by the soul, as one of the days of hell; for so it was by David, "The sorrows of death have compassed me; the "pains of hell got hold upon me; I found trou-"ble and sorrow," Psal. cxvi. 3.

3. A third spring of that trouble and complaint, that breaks the banks of the Christian's spirit, is, the temptations of Satan, Mat. xiii. 39. He is a great enemy of all saints, and he envieth the quiet and comfort that their hearts are filled with, when his conscience is brimmed with horror and terror; and therefore tho' he knows he he cannot destroy their grace, yet he labours to disturb their peace: As the blessed Spirit of God is first a sanctifier, and then a comforter, working

grace in order to peace; so this cursed spirit of hell, is first a tempter, and then a troubler; first persuading to act sin, and then accusing for sin; and this is his constant practice upon the spirit of God's people; he cannot endure that they should live in the light of God's countenance when himself is doomed to eternal intolerable darkness.

And thus we see whence it is that the people of God, are often under trouble and complaint; all arises from these three springs of sin, within, deseitions within, temptations without.

If the saints could serve God without sinning, and enjoy God without withdrawing, and resist Satan without yielding, they might enjoy peace and comfort without sorrowing; this must be endeavoured constantly here, but it will never be attained fully but in heaven.

But yet so far as grace is the prevailing principle in the heart, and so far as the power of godliness is exercised in the life, so far the condition of a child of God is a condition of peace; for it is an undoubted truth, *That the fruit of righteousness shall be peace.* But suppose the people of God experience little of this comfort in this life, yet,

2. They find it in the day of death. Grace and holiness will minister unto us then, and that ministration will be peace. A believer hath a twofold spring of comfort, each one emptying itself into his soul in a dying season; one is from above him, the other is from within him: The

ring that runs comfort from above him, is the ood of Christ sprinkled upon the conscience; e spring that runs comfort from within him, the sincerity of his heart in God's service. When we ly upon a death-bed, and can reflect pon our principles and performances in the service of God, and there find uprightness and sincerity of heart running through all, this must eds be comfort. It was so to Hezekiah, "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight," Isa. xxxviii. 3.

Nothing maketh a death-bed so uneasy and ard, as a life spent in the service of sin and lust: Nothing makes a death bed so soft and sweet, s a life spent in the service of God and Christ. Or put the case the people of God should not meet with this comfort then: Yet,

3. They shall be sure to find it after death. f time bring none of this fruit to ripeness, why, et eternity shall; grace in time shall be glory n eternity; holiness now, will be happiness hen: Whatever it is a man soweth in this world, that he shall be sure to reap in the next world: "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of "the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth "to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life ever-"lasting," Gal. vi. 7, 8. When sin shall end in sorrow and misery, holiness shall end in joy and glory. Rom. vi 2. "Well done, thou good "and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy

"of thy Lord," Matth. xxv 23. Whoeve shareth in the grace of Christ, and conformet to the life of Christ in this world, shall share i the joys of Christ in the world to come; and th joy is joy unspeakable, and full of glory, 1 Pe i 18 Lo here is the fruit of godliness. Sa now, if there be not enough in religion, whe ther we respect profit or comfort, to engage u to be Christians throughout.

Consid. 4. What an entire resignation wicke men make of themselves to their lusts; and sha not we do so to the Lord Christ? They giv up themselves without reserve to the pleasure of sin; and shall we have our reserves in th service of God? They are altogether sinners and shall not we be altogether saints? They ru and faint not in the service of their lusts, an shall we faint and not run in the service of Christ Shall the servants of corruption have their ear bored at the door-posts of sin, in token of a entire and perpetual service, Exod. xxi. 6. an shall we not give ourselves to the Lord Christ to be his for ever? Shall others make a covenan with hell and death, Isa xxviii 15. and shall no we join ourselves to God in an everlasting cove nant that cannot be forgotten? Jer. l 5 *Acriu ille ad perniciem quam ad salutem?* Shall they take more pains to damn their souls, than we do to save ours? And make more speed to a place of vengeance, than we do to a crown of righte ousness? 2 Tim iv. 8.

Which do you judge best, to be saved ever

ingly, or to perish everlasting'y? Which do u count the best master, God, or the Devil? hrist, or your lusts? I know you will determine it on Christ's side. O then! when others rve their lusts with all their hearts: do you rve Christ with all your heart. If the hearts the sons of men be fully set in them to do evil, cclesi viii. 5 Jer. iii. 5 then much more let e hearts of the sons of God be fully set in them do good.

Consid. 5. If ye are almost Christians, ye will ever be able to appear with comfort before God, r to stand in the judgment of the last and great y. For this sad dilemma will silence every pocrite; If my commands were not holy, just nd good, why didst thou own them? If they ere holy, just and good, why didst thou not bey them? If Jesus Christ was not worth the aving, why didst thou profess him? If he was, hen, why didst not thou cleave to him, and close ith him? If my ordinances were not appointed convert and save souls, why didst thou sit nder them, and rest in the performance of them? r if they were, then why didst thou not submit the power of them? If religion be not good, hy doest thou profess it? If it be good, why oest thou not practise it? *Friend, how camest ou in hither, not having on a wedding-garment?* Matth xxii 12. If it was not a wedding-feast, hy didst thou come at the invitation? If it was, hen why didst thou come without a wedding-arment?

I would but ask an hypocritical professor of the gospel, What he will answer in that day? Verily, you deprive yourselves of all possibility of apology in the day of the righteous judgment of God. It is said of the man that had no wedding-garment on, that when Christ came and examined him, *He was speechless:* He that is graceless in a day of grace, will be speechless in a day of judgment; Professing Christ without a heart to close with Christ, will leave our souls inexcusable, and make our damnation unavoidable, and more intolerable. Matth. xi. 22.

These are the motives to enforce the duty; and O! that God would set them home upon your hearts and consciences, that you might not dare to rest a moment longer in a half-work, or in being Christians within a little, but that you might be altogether Christians.

Quest. But you will say possibly, How shall I do? What means shall I use, that I may attain to thorough work in my heart, that I may be no longer almost, but altogether a Christian?

Answ. Now I shall lay down three rules of direction, instead of many, to further and help you in this important duty, and so leave the work to God's blessing.

Direct. 1. Break off all false peace of conscience; this is the devil's bond to hold the soul from seeking after Christ. As there is the peace of God, so there is the peace of Satan; but they are easily known, for they are as contrary as heaven and hell, as light and darkness.

The peace of God flows from a work of grace the soul, and is the peace of a regenerate state; t the peace of Satan is the peace of an unre-enerate state, it is the peace of death in the rave: Job saith, there is peace, *There the icked cease from troubling*, Job iii. 17. So soul dead in sin, is full of peace, the wicked ne troubleth him not.

The peace of God in the soul, is a peace owing from a removal of guilt by justifying race, Rom. v. 1. *Being justified by faith in his lood, we have peace with God.* But the peace f Satan in the soul, arises and is maintained by stupidness of spirit, and insensibleness of guilt pon the conscience.

The peace of God, is a peace from sin, that ortifies the heart against it; "The peace of "God that passeth all understanding, shall keep "your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus," Phil. iv. 7. The more of this peace there is in he soul, the more is the soul fortified against sin; but the peace of Satan, is a peace in sin, "The "strong man armed keeps the house, and there "all is at peace," Luke xi. 21. The saint's peace, is a peace with God, but not with sin; he sinner's peace, is a peace with sin, but not with God, and this is a peace better broken than kept; it is a false, a dangerous, an undoing peace. My brethren, death and judgment will break all peace of conscience, but only that which was wrought by Christ in the soul, and is the fruit of the blood of sprinkling. "When he gives quiet-"ness, who can make trouble?" Job xxxiv. 29. Now that peace that death will break, why

ſhould you keep? Who would be fond of tha quietneſs which the flames of hell will burn i ſunder? And yet how many travel to hell, thro the fool's paradiſe of a falſe peace?

O! break off this peace; for we can have n peace with God in Chriſt, whilſt this peace re mains in our hearts. *Intus exiſtens prohibe alienum.* The Lord Chriſt gives no peace t them that will not ſeek it, and that man wi never ſeek it, that doth not ſee his need of it and he that is at peace in his luſts, ſees no nee of the peace of Chriſt. The ſinner muſt b wounded for ſin, and troubled under it, befor Chriſt will heal his wounds, and give him peac from it.

Direc. 2. Labour after a thorough work o conviction. Every conviction will not do it; th almoſt Chriſtian hath his convictions, as well a the true Chriſtian, or elſe he had never gone ſ far; but they are not ſound and right convict ons, or elſe he had gone farther. God will hav the ſoul truly ſenſible of the bitterneſs of ſin, be fore it ſhall taſte the ſweetneſs of mercy; th plow of conviction muſt go deep, and make dee furrows in the heart, before God will ſow th ſeed of grace and comfort there, that ſo it ma have depth of the earth to grow in. This is th conſtant method of God. Firſt, To ſhow a ma his ſin, then his Saviour; firſt, his danger, the his Redeemer; firſt, his wound, then his cure firſt, his own vileneſs, then Chriſt's righteouſ neſs; we muſt be brought to cry out, Unclean unclean; to mourn for him whom we hav

erced; and then he sets open for us a fountain wash in for sin, and for uncleanness, Zech. i. 4. the first verses compared with Zech. iii. 1. That is a notable place, Job xxxiii. 27, 28. "He looked upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not: He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." The sinner must see the unprofitableness of his unrighteousness, before he profits by Christ's righteousness. The Israelites are first stung with the fiery serpent, and then the brazen serpent is set up, Numb. xxi 6. 8. Ephraim is first thoroughly convinced, and then God's bowels of mercy work towards him. Thus it was with Paul, Manasseh, the jailor, &c. So that this is the unchangeable method of God in working grace, to begin with conviction of sin.

O! therefore labour for thorough conviction, and there are three things we should especially be convinced of:

1. Be convinced of the evil of sin, the filthy and heinous nature of it: This is the greatest evil in the world; it wrongs God, it wounds Christ, it grieves the Holy Spirit, it ruineth a precious soul; all other evils are not to be named with this. My brethren, tho' to do sin, be the worst work; yet to see sin, is the best sight; for sin discovered in its vileness, makes Christ to be desired in his fulness.

But above all, labour to be convinced of the

mischief of an unsound heart; what an abhor ring is it to God? what certain ruin it bring upon the soul? O! think often of the hypo crite's hell, Mat xiv. 51.

2. Be convinced of the misery and desperat danger of a natural condition; for till we se the plague of our hearts, and the misery of ou state by nature, we shall never be brought ou of ourselves.

3. Be convinced of the utter insufficiency an inability of any thing below Christ Jesus t minister relief to thy soul in this case. Al things besides Jesus Christ, are physicians of n value, Job xiii. 4. Duties, performances, pray ers, tears, self-righteousness, avail nothing in thi case; they make us like the troops of Tema Job vi. 19, 20. to return ashamed at our disap pointment from such failing brooks.

Alas! it is an infinite righteousness that mus satisfy for us; for it is an infinite God that i offended by us. If ever thy sin be pardoned, i is infinite mercy that must pardon it: If eve thou be reconciled to God, it is infinite merc must do it: If ever thy heart be changed, and th state renewed, it is infinite power must effect it and if ever thy soul escape hell, and be saved a last, it is infinite grace must save it.

In these three things right and sound con viction lieth, and where-ever the Spirit of Go worketh these through convictions, it is in orde to a true and sound conversion, for by this mean the soul is brought under a right qualification fo the receiving Christ.

You must know, that a sinner, *quatenus* a sinner, can never come to Christ; for he is dead in sin, in enmity against Christ; an enemy to God, and the grace of God; but there are certain qualifications that come between the soul's dead state in sin, and the work of conversion, and closing with Christ, whereby the soul is put into a capacity of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. No man is brought immediately out of his dead state, and made to believe in Jesus Christ; there are *termini mediantes*, some qualifications coming in between: Now sound convictions are the right qualifications for the sinner's receiving Christ; "For he came not to call the righteous, "but sinners to repentance," Matth ix 12, 13. That is, such as see themselves sinners, and thereby in a lost condition: So Luke explains it, "The Son of man is come to seek and to "save that which was lost, Luke xix. 10. He "is anointed, and sent to bind up the broken-"hearted, to comfort all that mourn," Isaiah lxi 1, 2.

O therefore, if you would be found Christians, get sound convictions; ask those that are believers indeed, and they will tell you, had it not been for their convictions, they had never sought after Christ for sanctification and salvation: They will tell you they had perished, if they had not believed, they had been in eternal bondage; but for their spiritual bondage, had they not been lost as to themselves, they had been utterly lost as to Christ.

Direc. 3. Never rest in convictions, till they end in conversion. This is that wherein most men miscarry; they rest in their convictions, and take them for conversion; as if sin seen were therefore forgiven, or as if a sight of the want of grace, were the truth of the work of grace.

That is a notable place, in Hosea xiii. 13. "Ephraim is an unwise son, for he should not "stay long in the place of the breaking forth of "children." The place of the breaking forth of children, is the womb; as the child comes out of the womb, so is conversion born out of the womb of conviction: Now when the child sticks between the womb and the world, it is dangerous, hazards the life both of mother and child: So when a sinner rests in conviction, and goes no farther, but sticks in the place of the breaking forth of children, this is very dangerous, and hazards the life of the soul.

You that are at any time under convictions, O! take heed of resting in them, do not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children: Tho' it is true, that conviction is the first step to coversion, yet it is not conversion; a man may carry his convictions along with him into hell.

What is that which troubleth poor creatures when they come to die, but this; I have not improved my convictions; at such a time I was convinced of sin, but yet I went on in sin, in the face of my convictions; in such a sermon I was convinced of such a duty, but I slighted the con-

iction: I was convinced of my want of Christ, nd of the readiness of Christ to pardon and save; ut alas! I followed not the conviction.

My brethren remember this, Slighted convictions are the worst death-bed companions. There are two things especially which above all thers make a death-bed very uncomfortable:

1. Purposes and promises not performed.
2. Convictions slighted, and not improved.

When a man takes up purposes to close with Christ, and yet puts them not into execution; nd when he is convinced of sin and duty, and et improves not his convictions; O! this will ling and wound at last.

Now therefore hath the Spirit of the Lord een at work in your souls; have you ever been onvinced of the evil of sin, of the misery of a natural state, of the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help; of the fulness and righteousness of Jesus Christ; of the necessity of resting upon him for pardon and peace, for sanctification and salvation? Have you ever been really convinced of these things? O then! as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last, and enjoy God for ever, Improve these convictions, and be sure you rest not in them, till they rise up to a thorough close with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so end in a sound and perfect conversion. Thus shall you be not only almost, but altogether Christians.

THE END.

A FEW

THOUGHTS

ON

ORIGINAL SIN:

BY

BISHOP BEVERIDGE.

I Believe that I was conceived in ſin, and brought forth in iniquity; and that, ever ſince, I have been continually conceiving miſchief and bringing forth vanity.

This article of my faith I muſt of neceſſity believe, whether I will or not; for if I could not believe it to be true, I ſhould therefore have the more cauſe to believe it to be ſo; becauſe, unleſs my heart was naturally very ſinful and corrupt, it would be impoſſible for me not to believe that which I have ſo much cauſe continually to bewail; or, if I do not bewail it, I have ſtill the more cauſe to believe it; and, therefore, am ſo much the more perſuaded of it, by how much the leſs I find myſelf affected with it. For, certainly, I muſt be a hard-hearted

wretch indeed, steeped in sin, and fraught with corruption to the highest, if I know myself so oft to have incensed the wrath of the most high God against me, as I do, and yet not be sensible of my natural corruption, nor acknowledge myself to be, by nature, a child of wrath, as well as others. For, I verily believe, that the want of such a due sense of myself, argues as much original corruption, as murder and whoredom do actual pollution. And, I shall ever suspect those to be the most under the power of that corruption, that labour most, by arguments, to divest it of its power.

And, therefore, for my own part, I am resolved, by the grace of God, never to go about to confute that by wilful arguments, which I find so true by woful experience. If there be not a bitter root in my heart, whence proceeds so much bitter fruit in my life and conversation? Alas! I can neither set my head nor heart about any thing, but I still shew myself to be the sinful off-spring of sinful parents, by being the sinful parent of a sinful off-spring; nay, I do not only betray the inbred venom of my heart, by poisoning my common actions, but even my most religious performances also, with sin. I cannot pray, but I sin; I cannot hear, or preach a sermon, but I sin; I cannot give an alms, or receive the sacrament, but I sin; nay, I cannot so much as confess my sins, but my very confessions are still aggravations of them; my repentance needs to be repented of, my tears

want washing, and the very washing of my tears needs still to be washed over again with the blood of my Redeemer. Thus, not only the worst of my sins, but even the best of my duties, speak me a child of Adam. Insomuch, that whensoever I reflect upon my past actions, methinks I cannot but look upon my whole life, from the time of my conception to this very moment, to be but as one continued act of sin

And whence can such a continued stream of corruption flow, but from the corrupt cistern of my heart? And whence can that corrupt cistern of my heart be filled but from the corrupt fountain of my nature? Cease, therefore, O my soul, to gainsay the power of original sin within thee, and labour now to subdue it under thee. But, why do I speak of my subduing this sin myself? Surely, this would be both an argument of it, and an addition to it. 'Tis to thee, O my God, who art both the searcher and cleanser of hearts, that I desire to make my moan: it is to thee I cry out in the bitterness of my soul. *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Who shall? Oh! who can do it, but thyself? Arise thou, therefore, O my God, and shew thyself as infinitely merciful in the pardoning, as thou art infinitely powerful in the purging away my sins

It is a matter of admiration to me, how any one, that pretends to the use of his reason, can imagine, that he shall be accepted before God, for what comes from himself! For how is it

ossible, that I should be justified by good works, when I can do no good works at all before I be justified? My works cannot be accepted as good, till my person be so; nor can my person be accepted by God, till first ingrafted into Christ; before which ingrafting into the true Vine, it is impossible I can bring forth good fruit; *The plowing of the wicked is sin*, says Solomon, Prov. xxi. 4. Yea, *The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord*, Chap. xv. 8. And if both the civil and spiritual actions of the wicked be sin, which of all their actions shall have the honour to justify them before God? I know not how it is with others, but, for my own part, I do not remember, neither do I believe, that I ever prayed in all my life-time with that reverence, or heard with that attention, or received the sacrament with that faith, or did any other work whatsoever with that pure heart and single eye, as I ought to have done. Insomuch that I look upon all my righteousnesses but as filthy rags, and it is in the robes only of the righteousness of the Son of God, that I dare appear before the Majesty of heaven.

I am resolved, that as I am not able to think or do any thing that is good without the influence of the divine grace; so I will not pretend to merit any favour from God, upon account of any thing I do for his glory and service.

And indeed I may very well put this resolution among the rest, for should I resolve to perform my resolutions by mine own strength,

I might as well resolve never to perform them at all: for truth itself, and mine own woful experience hath convinced me, that I am not able, of myself, so much as to think a good thought: and how then shall I ever be able, of myself, so much as to resolve upon rules of holiness, according to the word of God, or to order my conversation according to these resolutions, without the concurrence of the divine grace.

F I N I S.