**÷**Articles and Essays

Thomas Manton

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**God's Word in Our Hearts**

**by Thomas Manton**

“Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (Psa. 119:11). The duty of God’s children is to hide His Word in their hearts, and in so doing there must be a right end; their knowledge of it and delight in it is to be directed to practice.

One duty and necessary practice of God’s children is to hide the Word in their hearts. See it confirmed by a Scripture or two: “This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night” (Josh. 1:8); “Receive, I pray thee, the law from His mouth, and lay up His words in thy heart” (Job 22:22). Lay up His words as we would do choice things, that they may not be lost; and lay them up as a treasure to be used upon all occasions. In the heart let them not swim in the brain or memory only, but let the affections be moved therewith, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16): be so diligent in the study of the Scripture that it may become familiar with us, by frequent hearing, reading, meditating, conferring about it. As a stranger, let it not stand at the door, but receive it into an inner room; be as familiar as those that dwell with you. God complaineth of His people “I have written to him [Ephraim] the great things of My Law, but they were counted as a strange thing” (Hosea 8:12). To be strangers to the Word of God, and little conversant in it, is a great evil.

What is it to hide the Word in our hearts? (1) To understand it, to get a competent knowledge of it; we take in things into the soul by the understanding: “When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul” (Prov. 2:10). (2) When it is assented unto by faith. The Word is settled in the heart by faith, otherwise it soon vanisheth: “The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it “ (Heb. 4:2). (3) When it is kindly entertained. Christ complained “Ye seek to kill Me, because My Word hath no place in you” (John 8:37). Men are so possessed with lust and prejudice, that there is no room for Christ’s Word. Though it break in upon the heart with evidence and power, yet it is not entertained there but cast out again as an unwelcome guest. (4) When it is deeply rooted. Many men have flashes for a time: their affections may be much aloft, and they may have great elevations of joy, but no sound grace: ”ye rejoiced in his light for a season” (John 5:35). The Word must be settled into a standing affection, if we would have comfort and profit from it. We read of “The engrafted Word” (James 1:21): till there be the root of the matter in us, in vain do we expect fruit.

The reasons why this is one great duty and practice of the saints to hide the Word in their heart are two: first, that we may have it ready for our use. We lay up principles that we may lay them out upon all occasions. When the Word is hidden in the heart, it will be ready to break out in the tongue and practice, and be forthcoming to direct us in every duty and exigency. When persons run to the market for every pennyworth, it doth not become good housekeepers. To be seeking of comforts when we should use them, or to run to a book, is not so blessed as to hide it in the heart. “A good scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven...bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matt. 13:52). He hath not only this year’s growth but the last year’s gathering (for so is the allusion): he hath not only from hand to mouth, but a good stock by him. So should it be with the Christian, which is a very great advantage.

First, it will prevent vain thoughts. Why is evil so ready and present with us? Because our stock of spiritual knowledge is so small. A man that hath a pocket with more brass farthings than pieces of silver, will more readily draw out farthings than shillings; his stock is greater. So vain thoughts will be more ready with us, unless the Word dwell richly in our hearts. “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things” (Matt. 12:35). The workings of our spirits are as our treasure and stock. The mind works upon what it finds in itself, as a mill grinds whatever is put into it—chaff or corn. Therefore, if we would prevent evil thoughts and musings of vanity all the day long, we must hide the Word in our hearts.

Second, when you are alone and without outward helps, your hearts will furnish you with matters of counsel, or comfort, or reproof: “My reins instruct me in the night season” (Psa. 16:7). When we are alone, and there is a veil of darkness drawn upon the world, and we have not the benefit of a Bible, a minister, or Christian friends, our reins will instruct us; we may draw out of our heart that which will be for our refreshing. A Christian is to be a walking Bible: to have a good stock and treasure in himself.

Third, it will supply us in prayer. Barrenness and leanness of soul is a very great defect, which God’s children often complain of. One great reason is because the Word of God does not dwell plenteously in them. If the heart were often exercised in the Word, the promises would hold up our hearts in prayer, enlarge our affections, and we should be better able to pour out our spirits before Him. “My heart is inditing a good matter” (Psa. 45:1). What follows? “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” When the heart is full, the tongue will be loosed and speak freely. What is the reason we are so dumb and tongue-tied in prayer? Because the heart is so barren. When the spring is dry, there will be little water in the stream. “Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” then follows “praying with all supplication” (Eph. 6:17, 18). When we have a good store of the Word it will burst out in prayer,

Fourth, it will he a great help to us in all our affairs. Proverbs 6:21, 22, speaking of the precepts of God, “bind them upon thy heart; when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; when thou awakest it shall talk with thee.” Upon all occasions the Word will be ready to cast in seasonable thoughts. When we awake, our first thoughts in the morning will begin with God, to season the heart all the day; and as we are about our business, the Word will hold our hearts in the fear of God; and when we sleep, it will guard us from vain dreams and imaginations. In a wicked man sin engrosses all his thoughts: it employs him all the day, plays in his fancy all the night; it solicits him first in the morning, because he is a stranger to the Word of God. But a man that is a Bible to himself, the Word will ever be upon him, urging him to duty, restraining him from sin, directing him in his ways.

Fifth, it is a great relief against temptations to have the Word ready. The Word is called “The Sword of the Spirit.” In spiritual conflicts there is none like it. Those that ride abroad in time of danger will not be without a sword. We are in danger, and had need handle the Sword of the Spirit. The more ready the Scripture is with us, the greater advantage in our conflicts and temptations. When the Devil came to assault Christ, He had Scripture ready for him, whereby He overcame the tempter. The door is barred upon Satan, and he cannot find such easy entrance, when the Word is hid in our hearts, and made use of pertinently. “I write to you, young men, because ye are strong.” Wherein lies their strength? “And the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:14). O it is a great advantage when we have the Word not only by us, but in us, engrafted in the heart! When it is present with us, we are more able to resist the attacks of Satan. Either a man forgets the Word or has lost his affections to it, before he can be drawn to sin,

Sixth, it is a great relief in afflictions. Our fainting in trouble come from ignorance or forgetfulness: “Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him” (Heb. 12:5). If we had a herb growing in our garden that would ease our smart, what, are we the better if we know it not? There is no malady but what has its remedy in the Word. To have a comfort ready is a great relief. Seventh, it makes our conference and conversation with others more gracious. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). When we have a great deal of hidden treasure in the soul it will get out at the tongue, for there is a quick intercourse between the heart and the tongue. The tap runs according to the liquor wherewith the vessel is filled. Come to men of an unsavory spirit, pierce them, broach them, give them occasion again and again for discourse, and you get nothing but frothy communication from them and vain talk. But now a man that has stored his heart with the Word is ever and anon interposing for God. Like a bottle filled with wine, he must have vent. As the Spouse’s lips are said to “drop as honeycombs,” they are ever putting forth savoury expressions in their converse with others.

Before I go to the second reason, let me anticipate an objection. Is not this to take from the Spirit and give it to the Word? And that to the Word not as written in God’s book, but as it is in our hearts Will not this be to ascribe all to created grace? I answer (1) Without question, it is the office of the Spirit to bring things to our remembrance, and the great help He gives is by suggesting such passages as may be of most seasonable relief to the soul in temptations, in prayer, and in business (John 14:16). But what is ascribed to the Scriptures and grace is not to the robbing of the Spirit, for the Scripture is of His inditing, and grace is of His working; yea, we still reserve the chief honour to the Holy Spirit, for He not only works grace, but works by grace. He not only indites the Scripture, but operates by it; it is He that quickens prayer, and therefore it is ill trusting to our own understanding and memory, for it is the Spirit that is the great Remembrancer, and impresses upon the mind seasonable thoughts.

(2) I grant further, the children of God are subject to much forgetfulness of the Truth that is impressed upon their hearts; partly through the present cloud and mist which the temptation raiseth. The Psalmist had truths enough to support him, yet he said, “Until I went into the sanctuary of God, I was foolish and ignorant; I was as a beast before Thee” (73:17, 22). There is so much dullness upon the children of God that they cannot remember seasonable thoughts; as Hagar had a fountain by her, yet she did not see it till God opened her eyes (Gen. 21). So under temptation all are benighted, and the light that is in the understanding is obscured. And partly through the little sense they have for the present need of the comforts which the Word propounds; few are so wise as to lay up for a bad year. And partly through sloth and negligence, being taken up with other things. It is possible sometimes that we may be guided by the Spirit, and act right merely by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, without any interposing and concurrence of our own understandings as John 12:13 compared with verse 16:—“They took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet Him; and cried, Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord...these things understood not His disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him.” Mark they were guided by the Spirit to do that they knew not for the present.

(3) The Holy Spirit makes use of a sanctified memory, bringing Scripture to our remembrance as we have need. It is made their act, because the Holy Spirit made use of their memories: they “remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up” (John 2:17). They that neglect to search and hide the Word in their hearts, have not such seasonable refreshment; for God works more strongly with the strongest graces; there where there is the greater receptivity, there is the greater influence; those that are ignorant cannot expect such help as those having the Word dwelling richly in them.

The second reason is, therefore should we hide the Word in our hearts, because God doth so in the work of conversion: “I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). The mind is compared to tables of stone, and the heart to the ark; and so this is required of us to “write them upon the table of our heart” (Prov. 7:3). How doth this follow? because God does in conversion, therefore it is our duty? I answer (1) God requires what He works to show the creature’s duty, as well as the power of His own grace. God is to convert, yet do you turn; circumcise your heart and I will circumcise; mortify your members, and yet “If ye through the Spirit do mortify. “He gives and requires, to engage the subserviency of our endeavours, and to make us sensible of our obligation. (2) This follows because this work must he gone over and over that it may be more explicit. We must revive the work, and put a fresh copy of the Law into our hearts, to keep the old work a-foot.

Use 1. To persuade you to study the Scripture, that you may get understanding and hide the Word in your hearts for gracious purposes. This is the Book of books: let it not lie idle. The world can as well be without the sun as the Bible—Psalm 19 speaks first of the sun, then of the Law of God, which is to the Christian as the sun is to the outward world. Consider the great use of the Word for informing the understanding and reforming the will. The Word of God is able “to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished” (2 Tim. 3:17). “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word” (Psa. 119:9). A young man that is so heedless and headstrong, and in the very heat of his lusts, yet there is enough in the Word to cleanse, tame, and subdue him to God. Therefore let us get it into our hearts. To this end:

Meditate often on it: “Mary kept all these sayings” (Luke 2:19). How did she keep them? She “pondered them in her heart.” Musing makes the fire to burn, and deep and constant thoughts are operative. The hen which straggles from her nest when she sits a-brooding produces nothing; it is a constant incubation which hatches the young. So when we have only a few straggling thoughts, and do not brood upon the Truth; when we have flashes only, like a little glance of a sunbeam upon a wall, it does nothing; but serious thoughts, through the Lord’s blessing, will do the work. Urge the heart again and again. Ask, is this a Truth?—then what will become of me if I disregard it; is this the Word of God, and does it find no more entertainment in my heart?

Receive it in the love of it. The Apostle makes this to be the ground of apostasy: “because they received not the love of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:10). O let it soak into the affections. If it lie only in the tongue or in the mind, only to make it a matter of talk and speculation, it will he soon gone. The seed which lies upon the surface, the fowls of the air will pick it up. Therefore hide it deeply; let it soak further and further. First men have a naked apprehension of truth, then it gets into the conscience, then it lies in the heart, then it is laid up. When it is dearer than our dearest lust, then it will stick by us. When it breaks in upon the heart with evidence and power, you cannot keep both.

Use 2. To direct you what to do in reading. It is a notable preservative against sin, and an antidote against the infection of the world: “The Law of God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide” (Psa. 37:31). As long as truth is kept lively and active, and in view of conscience, we shall not slide, or not so often. We have many temptations to divert us from obedience; but we are in safety when the Law of God is in our heart. See how it was in Joseph’s heart: “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”—against God, that is of such sovereign majesty; of such infinite goodness and mighty power, so able to save and to destroy! Every time you read the Scripture you should lay up something. The best way to destroy ill weeds is by planting the ground with right seed. Then for promises: what have you hidden in your heart for comfort against desertions and afflictions? In a time of trial you will find one promise gives more comfort and support than all the arguments that can be produced by reason. “This is my comfort in my affliction: Thy Word hath quickened me” (Psa. 119:50). He had a word to support him: therefore let us treasure up the promises. So for threats, especially against the sins we are most inclined to: “Who among you will give ear, and hear for the time to come?” (Isa. 42:23). It is well with you for the present, but matters to come are put off, little cared for: Amos 6:3. You should think of and provide against what will come afterward.

So in hearing. Do not hear lightly, but hide the Word in your heart, that it be not embezzled by your own negligence, forgetfulness, running into carnal distractions; that it be not purloined by Satan, that he may not snatch away the good Seed out of your soul. When the Word is preached, there is more company present than is visible; there are angels and demons in the assembly. Whenever the sons of God meet together, Satan is there too. The Devil is present to divert the mind by wandering thoughts, by raising prejudices that we may cast out the Word—or by excuses, delays, evasions, putting it off to others when we begin to have some sense of our sin and danger. The Devil is loath to let us go too far, lest Christ get a subject into His kingdom. Therefore let us labour to get something into the heart by every sermon: some fresh consideration is given out to set you a-work in the spiritual life. A conscientious waiting upon God will find something every time. It is sad to consider how many have heard much, and laid up little or nothing at all; it may be they have laid it up in their notebooks, but not laid up the Word in their hearts.

For meditation. Meditate upon the Word: do not study it in a cursory manner, or content yourselves with a slight taste, or a little volatile affection; but ponder it seriously, that it may enter into your very heart. Hasty and perfunctory thoughts work nothing. Meat must be well chewed and digested, if you would have it turn into good blood and energy. You must follow the Word closely till it settle into some affection. So much then for David’s practice: “Thy Word have I hid in my heart.” The second thing is the aim and end of it: “that I might not sin against Thee.”

In hiding the Word in our hearts there must be a right design: our knowledge of it and delight in it are to be directed to practice. First, we must not study the Word merely out of curiosity, that we may know what is said there, as men will pry into civil art and secular subjects. So the Athenians flocked about Paul: Acts 17:18-21; so for novelty’s sake men may have an affection in the Word—“ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35). There are certain adulterous affections we have to the Word when it is new and fresh, but when it grows familiar we loathe it. This affection to the Word is soon spent.

Second, we must not hide the Word in our heart that we may be able to teach others, that we may make a gainful trade of it. Alas! a man may teach others and be himself a castaway. Look, as in coining of money, an iron stamp may impress the character and print upon a piece of silver or of gold, so God may use the gifts of some men to beget faith in others, and perish themselves. “We have prophesied in Thy name,” yet “depart from Me; I know you not” (Matt. 7:22-23).

Third, this must not be our end either: not merely for delight. Largeness of knowledge brings a content with it, as it is an addition to our equipment. Truth is the object of our understanding, and may please an unsanctified mind. Not merely out of subserviency to some base and inferior ends, that we get esteem in the world or the reputation of knowing persons, but as it is an elevation of the understanding. Every delight in Truth is not a delight in God! There is a natural delight we have in the contemplation of any sublime truth: this is merely a delight in the work of our own faculties, when the affections are terminated in bare knowledge—as it is a high and mysterious truth, or as it is a delectation to the understanding.

Fourth, we are not merely to study the Word for the comfort of it, and the suitableness to the conscience. As man is a reasonable creature, he will delight in knowledge; and as he has a conscience which presages death and judgment to come, he may delight in the comfort of it. Many search out promises, but do not love precepts. The stony ground seem to have a joy; they may delight in the comfortable part of religion, but this joy comes to nothing—this gladsome forward spring is no sure prognostication of a plentiful harvest. Then only do we receive the Word aright when we look to the holy part, and mortify our natural desires and affections. Many deal with the Word as great men do with fleshly companions—willing to entertain them at their tables—to hear their discourse, because of the pleasantness of their mirth; but to enter into bonds for them, and discharge them from debt, or better their fortunes, that they will not do. So many will give Christ and the Word, especially the comfortable part of it, entertainment; but they are loath to take the duty of the Gospel unto themselves. Therefore it is not enough to study the Word merely that we may cherish our own persons with the comforting part of it, but we must also study the holy part and that which does require our duty. Then let us labour to hide the Word in our hearts as David did: that we may not sin against God.

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**÷Holiness**

**by Thomas Manton**

"Behold I have longed after Thy precepts; quicken me in Thy righteousness" (Psa 119:40). Desires set upon holiness are an affection properly exercised, and upon its due object. Desire is an earnest reaching forth of the soul after good absent and not yet attained. The object of it is something good, and the more truly good it is the more is our desire justified. There are certain bastard goods of a base and transitory nature, as pleasure, profit—we may easily overlash, and exceed in these things. But on holiness, which is more high and noble, and is truly good, and of great vicinity and nearness to our chiefest good than those others things are, we cannot exceed—there the faculty is rightly placed.

When we are hasty and passionate for those other things, the heart is corrupted, it is hard to escape sin: "He that makes haste to be rich cannot be innocent" (Pro 28:20); and he that loves pleasure is in danger of not loving God (2Ti 3:4). But now in holiness there is no such snare: a man cannot be holy enough, nor like enough to God; and therefore here we may freely let out our affections to the full. When our desires are freely let out to other things, they are like a member out of joint, as when the arms hang backward, but here they are in their proper place; this is that which cannot be loved beyond what it doth deserve.

A Christian should set no manner of bounds to himself in holiness for he is to "be holy in all manner of conversation" (1Pe 1:15), and to be "perfect as our heavenly Father" (Mat 5:48). And then desire is not only after that which is good, but after a good absent. Desire ariseth from a sense of vacuity and emptiness. Emptiness is the cause of appetite and therefore is compared to hunger and thirst: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Mat 5:6)., So it is in desiring holiness, we have not yet attained (Php 3:13). There is an indigence and emptiness; we are not already perfect—we want more than we have, and our enjoyments are little in comparison of our expectations, and therefore we should make a swifter progress towards the mark, and with more earnestness of soul should press after that sinless estate we expect.

That little we have doth but quicken us to inquire after more, not cloy but provide the appetite. As a man hath a better stomach sometimes when he doth begin to eat, so when we begin with God, and have tasted of holiness, and tasted of comfort, being brought into a sense of obedience and subjection to God, we should desire more; or certainly he is not good that doth not desire to be better. So that David might well say, "I have longed after Thy precepts."

[http://www.eternallifeministries.org/tm holiness.htm](http://www.eternallifeministries.org/tm_holiness.htm)

**÷Mortified Eyes**

**by Thomas Manton**

“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity: quicken Thou me in Thy way” (Psa 119:37). The first request is for the removing of impediments to obedience, the other for addition of new degrees of grace. These two are fitly joined, for they have a natural influence upon one another: unless we turn away our eyes from vanity, we shall soon contract a deadness of heart. When our affections are alive to other things, they are dead to God; therefore the less we let loose our hearts to these things, the more lively and cheerful the work of obedience. On the other side, the more the vigour of grace is renewed and the habits of it quickened into actual exercise, the more is sin mortified and subdued.

1. It therefore concerns those that would walk with God to have their eyes turned away from worldly things. He that would be quickened, carried out with life and vigour in the ways of God, must first be mortified, die unto sin. Speaking of the fruits of Christ’s death, the Apostle mentioned death unto sins before life unto righteousness (1Pe 2:25). If any would live with Christ, first they must learn to die unto sin. It is impossible for sin and grace to thrive in the same subject.

2. One great means of mortification is guarding the senses—eyes and ears, taste and touch—that they may not betray the heart. I put it so general because the man of God that is so solicitous about his eyes would not be careless of his ears and other senses. We must watch on all sides. When an assault is made on a city, if one gate be open it is as good as if all were. The ingress and egress of sin is by the senses, and much of our danger lies there. There are many objects that agree with our distempers, and by them insinuate themselves into the soul, and therefore things long since seemingly dead will soon revive again and recover life and strength. There are no means to keep the heart unless we keep the eye. In every creature Satan has laid a snare for us, to steal away our hearts and affections from God. The senses are so ready to receive these objects from without to wound the heart, for they are as the heart is. If the heart be poisoned with sin, and became a servant to it, so are the senses of our bodies “weapons of unrighteousness” (Rom 6:13). Objects have an impression upon them answerable to the temper and affections of the soul, and what it desires they pitch upon; and therefore if we let the senses wander, the heart will take fire.

3. Above all senses the eye must be guarded. First, because it is the noblest sense, given us for high uses. There is not only a natural eye to inform us of things profitable and hurtful for the natural man, but a spiritual use to set before us those objects that may stir us and raise our minds to heavenly meditations. By beholding the perfection of the creature we may admire the more eminent perfection of Him that made them: “the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psa 19:1). “For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhood” (Rom 1:20). The perfections of the creature are to draw us to God, and its defects to drive us from themselves. The eye, as it is used, will either be a help or a snare: either it will let in the sparks of temptation, or enkindle the fire of true devotion. These are the windows which God has placed in the top of the building, that man from there may contemplate God’s works and take a prospect of Heaven.

Second, because the eyes have a great influence upon the heart either to good or evil, but chiefly to evil. In this corrupt state of man, by looking we come to liking, and are brought inordinately to affect what we do behold. “Seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye used to go a whoring” (Num 15:39). “If my step hath turned out of the way, and my heart walk after mine eyes” (Job 31:7). These are the spies of the heart—brokers to bring it and the temptation together; the eye sees, and then by gazing the heart lusts, and the body acts the transgression. It is more dangerous to see evil than to hear it.

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**÷The Oppression of Man**

**by Thomas Manton**

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts” (Psa. 119:134). In the former verse the man of God had begged grace with respect to internal enemies—to the bosom enemy, the flesh—that no sin might have dominion over him. Now he begs for deliverance from external enemies. The saints are not only exercised with their corruptions, but also with the malice of wicked men. We have to do both with sin and sinners—with temptations and persecutions. And therefore he desires first to be kept from sin, and after that from danger and trouble. Both are a trouble to us; they were so to David; and God can and will in time give us deliverance from both.

In the text we have, first, a prayer for mercy: “Deliver me from the oppression of man.” In the Hebrew it is “from the oppression of Adam,” the name of the first father, for the posterity. This term is put either by way of distinction, aggravation, or diminution. 1. Man by way of distinction. There is the oppression and tyranny of Satan and sin—but the Psalmist does not mean that now. 2. Man by way of aggravation. No creatures are so ravenous and destructive to one another as man. It is a shame that one man should oppress another. Beasts do not usually devour those of the same kind, but usually a man’s enemies are those of his own household. The nearer we are in bonds of alliance, the greater the hatred. We are of the same stock, and reason should tell everyone of us that we should do as we would be done to. Nay, of the same religion. We are cemented together by the blood of Christ, which obliges us to more brotherly kindness; and if we differ in a few things, we have more cause of alliance and relations enough to love one another more than we do. But for all this there is the oppression of man.

3. Man by way of diminution. To lessen the fear of this evil, the term “Adam” is given men, to show their weakness in comparison with God. Thou are God, but they that are so ready and forward to oppress and injure us are but men; Thou can easily overrule their power and break the yoke. I think this consideration chief because of other passages: “Thou wilt judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psa. 10:18). The oppressors are but men of the earth, a piece of red clay—frail men, that must within a while be laid in the dust. But it is more emphatically expressed: “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forgettest the LORD thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if were ready to destroy? And where is now the rage of the oppressor?” (Isa. 51:12, 13). When you have the immortal and almighty God to be your Protector, should you be afraid of a weak mortal man that is but Adam—a little enlivened dust? Within a little while he and all his fury is over and gone.

In the text we have, second, a resolution and promise of duty: “I will keep Thy precepts.” This is a constant observation of all God’s commandments. If God would interpose for his rescue. But did David do well to suspend his obedience upon so uncertain a condition? I answer— No. We must not understand it so as if he did bargain with God upon those terms and not otherwise; or as if before he had not kept them, and would now begin to. No, he would keep them; only this would be a new engagement to press him to keep them more constantly and more accurately. Look throughout this Psalm, and you shall find David still at his duty whatever his condition is. “The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from Thy law” (v. 5l)—there he is scorned, but not discouraged. “The hands of the wicked have robbed me; yet have I not forgotten Thy law” (v. 61)—there he is plundered, yet not discouraged. “The proud have forged a lie against me but I will keep Thy precepts with my whole heart” (v. 69)—falsely accused but not discouraged. His meaning was not that he would serve God no longer unless He would deliver him, but that he should have a new obligation—this should engage us afresh. He does beforehand promise that he would walk with God more closely.

From the text thus opened, we have these points:—First, deliverance from oppression is a blessing to be sought from the hands of God in prayer. Second, when God delivers us from the oppression of man, we should be quickened and encouraged in His service. Third, when we are praying for deliverance, we may interpose a promise for obedience. I will develop the first point by answering the question why, and then show you how. Why? This may be strengthened by these reasons—

First, we have liberty to ask for temporal things. Many think it too carnal to pray for health, food and raiment, long life, temporal deliverance. But what God has promised we may lawfully pray for: a prayer is but a promise sued for. These blessings are adopted into the covenant, as being useful to us in our journey; and therefore we may ask for them. Christ has taught us to pray that we may ask: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Protection and maintenance we ask for, as well as pardon and grace. It conduces to the honour of God that we should ask these things of Him, that we may testify our dependence, and acknowledge His inspection and government over all the affairs of the world. “He hath prepared His throne for judgment” (Psa. 9:7). Courts of justice among men are not always open to hear the plaintiff, but the Lord holds court continually: we may come to Him every day. He has prepared His throne to this end: to hear the petitions of His people when they are oppressed.

Second, our spiritual welfare is concerned in such temporal deliverances that we may serve God without impediment or distraction. The oppression of man is an impediment: it takes us away from many opportunities of service and bringing honour to God. “Pray that your flight be not in winter or on the Sabbath Day” (Matt. 24:20). Though it were lawful, it was grievous to the body to have flight in winter; to the soul to have it on the Sabbath. “Oppression will make a wise man mad” (Eccl. 7:7): it will discompose our spirits. Therefore it being so that oppression is ever reckoned among the temptations, we may pray not to enter into it.

Third, the glory of God is concerned. His people will honour Him more if one, especially an eminent one, be delivered from the oppression of men: “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name” (Psa. 142:7). Besides the honour done to God by His people, He will more manifest Himself and His justice to the world. “The LORD is known by the judgments which He executeth” (Psa. 9:16). The world is led by sense: God will not be regarded as a Friend to persecutors. In short, it is not for the honour of God that His people should be left under oppression, as if He sought not after and cared for their welfare. Note how the afflicted condition of the church is called “the reproach of the heathen” (Ezek. 36:30). The heathen would cast this in their teeth, as if their God had no respect for them or were not able to help them.

Fourth, prayer engages us to constancy. God’s deliverance will be better for us than our own; that is, than those sinful shifts and ways of escape that we can devise. What we ask of God must be had in God’s way. It binds us to seek no other way of escape than we can commend to God’s blessing in prayer. It is said of the saints: they “were tortured, not accepting deliverance: that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35). Would any refuse deliverance when it is tendered to them? Yes, upon such spiteful conditions: they were commanded to do something contrary to the laws of God, and therefore they preferred God’s deliverance and not their own.

Fifth, seeking deliverance at the hands of God does ease the heart of a great deal of trouble, and deliver it from those inordinate affections and tormenting passions which otherwise the oppression of man might raise in us—fear, grief, anger, envy, despair, dread to suffer more, sorrow for what we suffer already, anger and envy against those oppressors by whom we suffer, and despair because of the continuance of our molestations. All these are mischiefs to the soul, but can be cured by prayer.

1. Fear, because of the mightiness of them that oppress, or threaten to oppress. We are told that “the fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25). We are full of distracting thoughts, and if we cherish them they will weaken our trust in God and dependence upon His promises. Nay, the mischief will not stop there: they who trust not God, can never be true to Him: we shall run to carnal shifts and fearing men more than God do things displeasing to Him. But how shall we ease our hearts of this burden? By prayer? Partly, because then we use our fear aright when it only drives us to seek God’s protection: “Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD” (2 Chron. 20:3). And partly because prayer discovers a higher object of fear: the fear of God drives out the fear of man. In God’s strength we may defy enemies: see Psalm 27:1.

2. Grief. It clogs the heart and stays the wheels so that we drive on heavily in the spiritual life. Worldly sorrow works death (2 Cor. 7:10): it brings on hardness of heart and quenches all our vigour. “By sorrow of heart the spirit is broken” (Prov. 15:13). A heavy heart does little to the purpose for God. Now how shall we get rid of this? The cure is by prayer. For vent gives ease to all our passions. “Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). As when wind gets into the caverns of the earth, it causes terrible convulsions and earthquakes till it get a vent: so the mind is eased when we can pour out our care into the bosom of God, and wait till deliverance comes from above.

3. The violent passions of anger, envy, and revenge against oppressors: these are all for naught and do a world of mischief. Anger discomposes us, and transports the soul into uncomely motions against God and men, making us fret, and tempting us to atheism (Psa. 73); making us weary in well doing (Psa. 37). The Devil works upon such discontent, and we are apt to run into these disorders. How shall we get rid of these distempers? By prayer, in which we get a sight of the other World, and then these things will seem nothing to us. Prayer acquaints ourselves with God and the process of His providence, and so we shall see an end of things (Psa. 73:17); then all is quiet. And so for revenge, that, too, is an effect of the former. When we plead before God we see the justice of what is unjust, and hard dealings from men to be justly inflicted by God; and so the heart is calmed—“the Lord bid him curse” (2 Sam. 16:11). Our very praying is a committing ourselves to Him that judges righteously, and therefore we ought not, we need not, avenge ourselves.

4. Impatience and despair. This is a very great evil, contrary to faith and hope and dependence, which the Christian religion does mainly establish; and makes way for the worst ends— either total apostasy from God, or atheism, or self-destruction. Now this is very detrimental to us when oppressions lie long upon us: “this evil is from the LORD; why should I wait on the LORD any longer?” (2 Kings 6:33). “But thou saidest, There is no hope” (Jer. 2:25). Desperate! “No, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go”: I will take my own course: there is no hope—it is vain to wait upon the Lord any longer. And even if things do not grow to that height, yet the children of God become wary and faint in their minds (Heb. 12:3). Now we must keep afoot some hope while we have a heart to call upon God. The suit is still pending in the court of Heaven when it seems to be over on earth: and we see there is cause to wait for God’s answer. “He that shall come, will come” (Heb. 10:37). God may tarry long, but will never come too late.

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts” (Psa. 119:134). But how is this to be asked? First, this is not to be asked as our main blessing: “seek ye first the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33). If we seek our ease and temporal felicity only, that prayer is like a brutish cry: “And they have not cried unto Me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds” (Hosea 7:14). A dog will howl when he feels anything inconvenient. You will never be freed from murmuring and quarrelling at God’s dispensations and questioning His love, if this be the first thing that you seek; and so your prayers will become your snare. Besides the great dishonour to God, it argues the great disorder of your affections that you can be content to have anything apart from God: “Seek ye the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore” (Psa. 105:4). In all conditions that must be our great request, that we may have the favour of God.

Second, it must be asked with submission. It is not absolutely promised, nor intrinsically and indispensably necessary to our happiness, but if the Lord sees fit for His own glory and our good. We cannot take it ill if a friend refuses to lend us a sum of money which he knows will be to our loss and detriment. God sees fit, sometimes, for His own glory and our good, to continue us under oppression, rather than take us out of it. There are two acts of Providence: relieving and comforting the oppressed, and punishing the oppressors. Sometimes God does the one without the other, sometimes both together. Sometimes God will only comfort the oppressed; we cry to Him in our afflictions, and God will not break the yoke but give us strength to bear it: “in the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and hast strengthened me with strength in my soul” (Psa. 138:3). He gives you strength to bear the burden, if you continue in your integrity. Sometimes God does punish the oppressor, yet that is no relief to you. You must bear it, for you are to stand to God’s will and to wait His leisure to free you from it.

Third, your end must be that God may be glorified, and that you may serve Him more cheerfully. So it is in the text. And again, “Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, Thou that liftest me up from the gates of death; that I may show forth all Thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion; and I will rejoice in Thy salvation” (Psa. 9:13, 14). David begs salvation in order to praise. Temporal mercy should not be loved for itself, nor sought for itself; but as we may glorify God by it: that is to be our end. Lord, I seek not my own interest, but Thine. If you have a carnal end, you miss: “Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3)— that ye may please the flesh.

Fourth, we must pray in faith, that God can deliver from the oppression of man, and will do so in due time, when it is good for us. Though our oppressors be ever so mighty, God can break their power, or change their heart. It is a great relief to the soul to consider the several ways that God has to right us. “Then had the churches rest...and were multiplied” etc., (Act. 9:31). When was that? When Paul was converted. He was an active instrument against the Church, and God turned his heart; then had the churches rest. Or the Lord may do it by determining their interests that they shall show favour to His people though their hearts be not changed: “when a man’s ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7). Please men, and you cannot say God is your Friend; but please God, and He makes your enemies at peace with you. There is much in the secret chain of Providence: see Daniel 1:9. God can break the yoke by raining judgments on them: see Isaiah 49:24, 25. Therefore we should not be disdiscouraged with unlikelihood when we go to God, who has many ways which poor shortsighted creatures cannot foresee.

God is ready to deliver us. The love which the Lord has for His afflicted people will not suffer His justice to be quiet very long. That God is ready to help and deliver will appear from these things. 1. It is His nature to pity and show mercy to the oppressed and to revenge the oppressor. He pities the afflictions of them that suffer justly, and far beneath their desert, from His own hand: “they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD, and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel” (Judg. 10:16 and cf. 2 Kings 14:26)—how much more will He pity them that are unworthily oppressed! And the Lord’s pitiful nature does incline Him to deliver His people: and when the oppressed cry, “I will hear them; for I am gracious” (Exo. 22:21-27).

2. It is His usual practice and custom: “the LORD executeth judgment and righteousness for all that are oppressed” (Psa. 103:6). If for all; surely for His people. He sits in Heaven to rectify the disorders of men: see Psalm 34:19. 3. It is His office as Judge of the world: “Lift up Thyself, Thou judge of the earth; render a reward to the proud” (Psa. 94:2). Look upon Him only in that notion, according to our natural conceptions, as the supreme cause and Judge of all things. Again, His office as Protector of His people: He is in covenant with them, He is their Sun and Shield, His people’s Refuge in time of trouble (Psa. 9:9), when they have none else to flee to.

Now for instruction to teach us what to do when we are oppressed. First, patience. It is the lot of God’s children to be often troubled with the world: and badly used. Satan is the ruler of the darkness of this world, and his subjects cannot endure those who would overturn his kingdom. The good are few, and therefore must look to be oppressed. If there be any breathing room it is God’s mercy. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12 and cf. Gal. 4:29).

Second, let us be prepared to commend our cause to God: “LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt prepare their hearts, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear: to judge the fatherless and the oppressor that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psa. 10-17, 18). God prepares the hearts of the humble, How so? By continuing the trouble till they are sensible of the misery of the sin—of the cause. “I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offenses and seek My face” (Hosea 5:15).

Third, when you have prayed, then wait. It is a good sign when we are engaged in prayer, and encouraged to wait. When God has a mind to work, He sets the spirit of prayer at work. How can our prayers be heard when we regard them not ourselves and expect no issue? How should God hear when we pray out of course and do not think our prayers worth the regarding? “I waited patiently for the LORD, He inclined unto me and heard my cry” (Psa. 40:1). “I will watch to see what He will say” (Hab. 2:1). Look for an answer: God does not usually disappoint a waiting people.

When God delivers us from the oppression of man we should be quickened and encouraged in His service. First, because every mercy infers an answerable duty: “But Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him” (2 Chron. 32:25). There must be rendering according to the receiving. Second, this is the fittest return, partly because it is real, not verbal. The Lord cares not for words—He knows the secret springs of the heart: see Psalm 50:23. It is good to be speaking good of God’s name. This is one way of glorifying, but ordering the conversation aright is that which is most pleasing to Him. And partly, too, because our fear and sorrow are taken away: “I will run the way of Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Psa. 119:32 and see Luke 1:74, 75).

We are now under the sad effects of our former unthankfulness, and by remembering our duty we may see our sin. Ingratitude and walking unanswerably to received mercy is the great and crying sin of God’s people; therefore we should humble ourselves that we did so little good and that God had so little glory and service from us in former times of liberty. Now God by His present providence shows us the difference: “Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies” etc., (Deut. 28:47, 48 and see 2 Chron. 12:8). We must be humbled for the abuse of former mercies before we seek new.

Thus we may know (from the second part of our text) what to have in our eye when we are asking for mercies. The end is first in intention, though last in execution. Do not pray to serve thy lusts more freely, nor think how to execute revenge, nor how we should be provided for—but what glory and service we may bring to God: see Psalm 75:2. It also teaches us how to make our promises to God. When you promise duty and obedience to Him, be sure to be sincere and holy; make due provision that it may be so by mortifying the roots of such distempers as will betray us. When a people in a low condition have a real inclination to praise and glorify God by their mercies as soon as they shall receive them, it is an argument that He will hear.

Condensed by Arthur W. Pink. Originally edited by Emmett O'Donnell for Mt. Zion Publications, a ministry of Mt. Zion Bible Church, 2603 West Wright St., Pensacola, FL 32505. <www.mountzion.org>

**÷Reproaches Improved**

**by Thomas Manton**

In his sermon on Psalm 119:39, Thomas Manton pointed out that though reproaches are a great and grievous affliction to the saint, yet he is to discern God’s hand in them. Reproaches come not by chance, but are a necessary part of God’s disciplinary dealings with His people: sent to humble, prove, and purge them. Our enemies intend us harm by them, but we should receive good by this as by every affliction. When God suffers others to judge and misjudge us, it is to awaken us to self-judging. Attend to this, and we be no losers by reproaches. Many times the voice of a slanderer will do for us that which the voice of a preacher cannot do. The renowned Puritan then went on to specify some of the believer’s sins which God visits with the sharp affliction of bitter reproaches and slanders. What follows is a quotation from his sermon.—*Arthur W. Pink*

1. Pride. There is a twofold pride: pride in mind, which is called self-conceit; and pride in affections, which is called vain-glory. Now there is no such effectual cure as reproaches for either of these. (1) To speak of the pride in mind, self-conceit. We are very apt to be puffed up for our doing and suffering for God—poor empty bladders are soon puffed up—and think ourselves somebody if there be but a little self-denial; as Peter said, “Master, we have left all and followed Thee” (Matt. 19:27). He was conceited over what he had left for Christ. What had he left? A net, a fish-boat; it was a great all indeed! We are easily puffed up if we suffer a little for God, and the Lord entrenches us in our worldly conveniences, for self-conceit may grow out of self-denial. Too often we find it so. Pride is a sin that grows out of mortification of other sins; it lives in us while we live in the body, therefore it is called “the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). Some compare it to a shirt: that garment is last put off. It is the most inward and nearest to the soul, and out of the conquest of other sins there ariseth pride.

Now if we have been too self-conceited the Lord will humble us, either by permitting us to fall into such scandals as may remind us of our frailty, and what unworthy weak creatures we are in ourselves; sometimes by taking off the restraints of His grace and of His Spirit, and permitting us to fall. Austin is bold in saying it is profitable for proud men to fall sometimes into open sin, that they may know and understand themselves. He speaks it upon the occasion of Peter, when he was boasting of his own strength, “Though all men leave Thee, yet will not I.” How foully did he fall! Ay; but at other times God uses more merciful dispensations, for He doth not let His people fall into those grievous sins but upon great provocation. Usually at other times He lets loose the tongues of virulent men to lessen us in our own opinion and in the opinion of the world. Now, however innocent we be of the crimes charged upon us, yet in all these cases we must look upward and inward.

Upward—this is not without God: He is the end of causes; He could blast these tongues, and stop them at His pleasure; the Lord can “keep us from the strife of tongues” (Psa. 31:20). But now, when He permits this, His hand must be owned: took upward, “I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against Him” (Micah 7:9). At such a time God spits in the faces of His people, and puts us to shame; and therefore we should look upward and see His hand in it all. And look inward; there you will see such a sink of sin as deserves this and much more; and therefore a sense of our sinfulness in other things will make us more submissive to the Lord’s correcting hand. If we do not look to that we will be drawn into reviling for reviling. Many times our graces do as much hurt as our sins. Self-conceit the Lord will mortify one way or other.

(2) For Vain-glory, the other sort of pride, valuing esteem too much, and our credit in the world, and pleasing ourselves in the opinion others have of us. We would usurp God’s throne in the hearts of men, therefore we are so touchy. Having set a high value upon ourselves, we are troubled when others will not come up to our price. Pride is one of the oldest enemies that ever God had: it was born in Heaven in the breasts of the fallen angels, but God tumbled them out as soon as pride got into their hearts. Now, when His children harbour it, the Lord hath a quarrel with them, and therefore, for giving entertainment to pride He will lay us low: “Lest I should be exalted above measure, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me” (2 Cor. 12:7).

There is a great deal to do of what this thorn in the flesh is. Some will have it to be some trouble or sickness. Most probably so, but it takes in many afflictive evils, for in verse 10 he mentions reproaches. Paul was too apt to be proud. The Lord made him an eminent instrument; by his faith he had abundance of revelations. But God will prick the bladder: He does it with thorns; and he calls it his infirmity, necessity, reproach. Infirmity, by that I mean some reigning sickness. But reproach was one ingredient. Now lest we should be puffed up by vain conceit, the Lord humbles us with infirmities, necessities, reproaches.

2. Another sin for which God humbles us is careless walking. When we are negligent, and do not take notice of the carnality that grows upon us, and the fleshly frame and temper of heart which breaks out into our lives, the Lord suffers others to reproach: then they gather up our filth, that we may see what cause we have to take our ways to heart. Every man that would live strictly has need either of faithful friends or watchful enemies: either faithful friends to admonish him, or watchful enemies to censure him; they show us the spots in our garments that need to be washed off. Many times a friend is blinded with love, and grows as partial to us as we are to ourselves; will suffer sin upon us and not tell us of it; then the Lord sets spies to watch for our halting (Jer. 20:10), and therefore we need to go to God and pray, “Lord, lead me, in a plain path because of my enemies” (Psa. 27:11). They lie in wait and seek to take us tripping in aught they can. We can no more be without watchful enemies than without faithful friends. How ignorant would a man be of himself if others did not put him in mind sometimes of his failings! Therefore God makes use of virulent persons in the world as a rod to thrash the dust out of our garments.

3. To humble us for our censuring. For if we have not been so tender of others’ credit, the Lord makes us see the bitterness of the affliction in our own case, by giving us the like measure that we have meted unto others (Matt. 7:1, 2): that is, we shall find others as hardly think of us as we have of them. Good thoughts and speeches of other men are the best preservative of our own good names. God will take care of them that are careful not to judge and censure. And therefore it is no great matter whether the report be true or false, but a Christian is to examine, Have not I drawn it upon myself by slandering others? for God usually pays us in our own coin. He that is much given to censuring seldom or never escapes great censure himself. It is said in the Psalms, “Let his own words grieve him,” that is, fall upon him. How do our own words fall upon us? Why, the Lord punishes us for our censuring of others. Oh! then, humble thyself before God for the reproaches thou hast cast upon others: “Take no heed to all the words spoken against thee, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee” (Eccl. 7:21), that is, speaking evil against thee. Hard sayings and speeches of others against us may put us in mind of God’s just hand, of measuring to us as we have measured to others; and therefore we should be the more patient if they wrong us; it is but in the like kind that we have wronged others. God will humble us for our censuring, which is so natural and rife, especially with younger, weak, and more unmortified persons.

The Lord buffets by wicked men to make you better. Reproaches are like soap, that seem to defile the linen it cleans. There is nothing so bad but we may make a good use of it, and a Christian may gain some advantage by it. Or as dung which seems to stain the grass, but it makes the ground fruitful, and the grass spring up with a fresher verdure. So reproaches are a necessary help to make us more humble, heavenly, to make us walk with an holy awe. This holy revenge we should take upon our enemies, to make us more strict and watchful. The way is, not to contend for esteem, but to grow more serious, more faithful in our lives; for this is the way to muzzle the mouths of adversaries, as the mouth of a dog or wild beast is (1 Peter 2:15). Passionate returns do but increase sin, but a holy conversation will silence all; and therefore you should confute calumnies, by binding their mouths thereby. An innocent, meek, unblameable, profitable life, will certainly have its due esteem in the consciences of men, do what they can. Therefore be more strict and reproaches will do you good.

A word to those that devise reproaches. You hazard the repute of your own sincerity: “If a man seem to be religious, and bridle not his tongue, that man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26). Such men, that are seldom at home, rarely look to the state of their own hearts. Alas! if they were acquainted with themselves, or their own failings, they would see themselves the worst people in the world. Paul can see himself worse than Judas—I am “the chief of sinners”—because he had a greater feeling of his own case. Now he that is much in judging others is seldom within. If a man had a catalogue of his own faults, he would not be so ready to blast others, but say, “I am the chief of sinners.” Hypocrites have nothing in them but empty shows and appearances. It is a cheap zeal to let fly (and yet this is the religion of a great many) at the miscarriages and faults of others. No—you should rather study your own.

But must we in no case speak evil of others? I answer, first, be sure that it be not a downright slander. Now, it is hard to avoid that. If the evil you speak be without cause, then it is against truth; if it be for a light and slender cause, then it is against charity; if it be for things indifferent or for lesser failings, the indiscretions and weaknesses of Christians, all this is against that charity which should pass especially between the disciples of Christ: “Speak not evil one of another, brethren” (James 4:11). It is worse in Christians, always to be whispering and speaking evil one of another; you gratify the triumphs of Hell. In things doubtful, you should judge the best; in things hidden and secret, we cannot take cognizance of them—that is God’s work. Besides, if there be some grievous fault, you do not know what were their temptations, how it may be alleviated by the temptation; still you must “consider yourselves lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:11); and you do not know whether they have repented of it.

Second, speak not of him, but to him. When men are absent it is not fit they should be judged, for then they are not able to make a defense; then it is backbiting. When you thus speak of them, you exchange a duty for a sin, admonition for reproach. It is an unquestionable duty to admonish one another, but it is an unquestionable sin to speak evil one of another. Third, if of him, it should he with tenderness and grief: “Of whom I have told you often, and now weeping,” saith the Apostle (Phil. 3:18). When they are incorrigible, when they are like to pervert others, and dishonour the Gospel, or the manifest glory of God, Oh! we would but lay restraints on ourselves in this kind, and never speak of others, but when manifestly the glory of God calls for it. Not out of idleness, and for want of other talk, that is tattle, forbidden in many places of Scripture; not out of hatred and revenge, for that is malice—there may be malice where the thing you speak is truth; not to please others, that is flattery. But if ever you speak of them (and it should be with these cautions) it must be out of zeal for the glory of God and the good of the Church. If men did consider what restraints are upon them, they would not so easily fall upon censuring, reproaching, and speaking evil of others.

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