CHARLES SIMEON'S DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARIES

JOB-SONG OF SOLOMON

 JOB

#449

JOB'S CONCERN FOR HIS CHILDREN

**[Job 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.5)**

"When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom."

Who Job was, or at what precise period he lived, or who wrote the book that is called by his name, is not certainly known. It is probable that he was a descendant of Nahor, Abraham's brother, [Genesis 22:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.20-21), and that he lived previous to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, because there does not appear to be any direct reference to that event, which there would in all probability have been, if it had taken place, and Job or his friends had been acquainted with it.

The Book of Job, with the exception of the first two chapters, and part of the last, is written in verse; and this has given occasion to some to imagine, that the whole book is a kind of poetic fiction; but there undoubtedly was such a man as Job, [Ezekiel 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.14); and the events referred to in the Book of Job did actually occur, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11); and the record of them was most assuredly inspired. It is referred to by Paul in this view. Compare [Job 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.13) with [1 Corinthians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.19).

Though therefore we admit that the conversation which passed between him and his friends is not recorded in the precise words used by the different speakers—yet it is certain that the substance of their respective speeches is correctly given, and that the record of them was written under the direction of God himself; so that it is, as much as any other part of the inspired volume, the Word of God.

The scope of the book must be clearly understood, and be borne in mind throughout; for, if we lose sight of that, the whole will be a mass of confusion. The friends of Job conceived that his extraordinary calamities proved that his former professions of piety had been hypocritical; and Job maintained, that the trials which a man might be called to endure were no just criterion whereby to judge of his state; since the most upright of men might be deeply afflicted, and the most ungodly of men might enjoy uninterrupted ease and prosperity.

And it will be found in the sequel, that, though Job in some instances was unguarded in his expressions, his views on the whole were right, and those of his friends erroneous. But we must not therefore conclude that his friends uttered nothing that was good. Their general opinions were just; but their application of them to Job's particular case was incorrect. Their premises were often right; but their conclusions were wrong. Their great error was that they thought such extraordinary dispensations of God's providence towards a man must be sent on account of some extraordinary wickedness committed by him. Conceiving themselves to be correct in this, they concluded Job to have been a hypocrite, and that God had now exposed his hypocrisy to the view of all; and Job, on the contrary, maintained that he had been upright in all his conduct, and that the judgment of his friends was uncharitable, erroneous, and wicked.

But it is not our intention to enter any further into the general question between Job and his friends at present; we have now only to consider the private character of Job, and that more particularly in reference to his family. He is represented as a man of most eminent piety, as being "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil, verse 1;" and from what is said of him in our text, he evidently deserved that high character. Let us consider then:

I. Job's conduct in relation to his family.

God had blessed him with a numerous family, whom he had reared to adulthood, and placed around him with separate establishments. But, notwithstanding he had thus liberally provided for them, and was evidently most indulgent towards them, (promoting to the uttermost a brotherly union among them, and permitting his daughters to enliven the innocent conviviality of their domestic circles,) he was exceedingly concerned and watchful over their eternal interests.

His seven sons had been entertaining each other in succession; and, though Job knew not that anything contrary to God's will had passed among them—yet, conceiving it possible that they might in their mirth have been transported too far, he called them to prepare themselves for a solemn attendance upon God, while he should offer for every one of them a burnt-offering unto the Lord.

Now consider this:

1. As an act of **magisterial authority**.

Job perhaps was a magistrate, possessing very high authority, and occupied to a great extent in judicial proceedings, [Job 29:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.5-10); yet he did not therefore think himself at liberty to neglect religion, or to confine his attention to private duties; he felt that the more exalted his station was, the greater was his responsibility, and the more urgent his duty to honor God before men.

What a blessing would it be, if all people of wealth and dignity would use their influence in this way! But the generality of great men think there is no need for them to stand forth as patrons and patterns of religion; they suppose they have an exemption from such open acts of piety as would attract observation, and make them appear particular; and that, if they countenance by their presence the public institutions of religion, it is quite as much as can be required at their hands.

But we must declare to all, that, if Job, with the small measure of light which he enjoyed, accounted it his duty to exert all his influence for the honor of his God, much more should we, who profess to have received the full light of the Gospel, feel it our duty to devote our faculties and our talents to the honor of Christ, and the extension of his kingdom upon earth.

2. As an act of **parental love**.

Many who have been careful of their children in their earlier days, cast off all concern about them, or at least decline all interference with them as to religious matters, when they have arrived at years of discretion. But Job did not do so; though he was an indulgent parent, he did not give up all parental authority, but sought to use it for the eternal welfare of his children. He called them all to self-examination and prayer, previous to his offering for them the sacrifices in which he commanded them to join. This is the meaning of the word "sanctified" See [Exodus 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.10); [Exodus 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.14). Yes, we are told, "Thus he did continually;" continually watching over their eternal interests, and using all his influence, both with them and with God, to bring them to the enjoyment of the divine favor.

In this Job is a pattern for parents in every age, and in every place. As long as God shall continue to them a sound mind, so long should they improve their authority for the enforcing of an attention to religious duties, and for the cultivating of a spirit of piety in the hearts of their children.

The peculiarity of his conduct naturally leads us to inquire into,

II. The grounds and reasons of Job's conduct.

Had any great evil been committed by his sons, to call forth that particular exercise of parental authority, we should have ascribed to that the conduct of this holy man; but, as no evil existed but in his apprehensions, we must look for the grounds of his conduct in some general views and principles to which it is to be traced.

1. Job's concern for his children was founded in **his views of the extreme depravity of our nature**.

Though he had trained up his children in pious principles, Job knew that by nature we are all prone to evil; and that there is no sin, however heinous, which if left to ourselves, we might not commit! He knew that they might even go so far as to speak lightly of God and his dispensations, whether of providence or grace; yes, through an evil heart of unbelief they might depart from God altogether, and actually renounce their allegiance to him. Hence he was desirous to obtain mercy for them, that, if they should have committed so great a sin, they might be brought back again to repentance, and not be left to perish forever in their iniquity.

Now in this respect the views of Job were just; for the heart of man by nature is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked!" And, whatever education he may have received, and whatever eminence in piety he may have attained, he has reason to pray, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps slip not!" Yes, he has reason to fear, "lest, having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away."

Just so, every person in the universe should bear this in mind, in reference both to himself and others; for it is "God alone that is able to keep us from falling," and it is only while "he holds us up, that we can be safe."

2. Job's concern for his children was founded in **the corrupt tendency of carnal mirth**.

Mirth may be very innocently enjoyed; but there is great danger, especially when indulged to any extent, that it may become an occasion of evil. It certainly tends to stupefy the conscience, and to deaden our affections towards God. When we are rejoicing much in earthly things, we are apt to languish in our desire for heavenly things; and to feel less ardent longings for the glory that shall be revealed. Moreover, when "we are full, there is danger lest we deny God, and say: Who is the Lord? [Proverbs 30:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.8-9)." It was against this that God cautioned his people of old, [Deuteronomy 8:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.10-11), and this effect Job saw as likely to be produced in his own children. Hence he called them to a particular recollection of their spirit and conduct during their days of feasting; he urged them to examine well their own hearts, and to implore help from God, that they might be enabled to discover any secret evil which might have lurked in their bosoms.

Now in this he set an admirable example unto us. The world is apt to fascinate our carnal hearts; and it is extremely difficult to "use the world without abusing it." Whenever therefore we have been mixing in its company and participating of its pleasures, it befits us carefully to examine our own hearts, lest we should have offended God by our forgetfulness of him, or contracted any stain that may render us odious in his sight.

3. Job's concern for his children was founded in **the universal need of an atonement for sin**.

Had Job offered one burnt-offering for them all, it would have sufficed to show them what judgments they merited at the hands of God, and that nothing but the great sin-atoning sacrifice could ever avert his wrath from them. But when he offered a separate burnt-offering for each of them, these lessons were inculcated with double force.

In truth, whether the young men had transgressed, or not, to the extent that their father feared, it was still necessary that they should apply to the blood of atonement to cleanse them from their sins.

Just so, we need one to "bear the iniquity of our holiest actions," and much more to expiate the guilt which we contract in an hour of conviviality and mirth, "Without shedding of blood there can be no remission" of any sin whatever; and a most important lesson we shall learn from this history, if we take occasion from it to get this truth deeply impressed upon our hearts.

Let us learn from hence:

1. To exercise a great concern and watchfulness over ourselves.

If it was right in Job to be jealous over his sons, then it must surely be right for all to maintain a similar disposition in reference to themselves; nor is it only after a season of conviviality that we should exercise it, but at all times. Not a day should pass without diligent self-examination how we have passed our time, and how we have performed our several duties in the world, the family, and the closet; what tempers we have manifested towards man, and what affections we have exercised towards God. Have we received everything, whether good or evil, as from him, and endeavored to enjoy him in our comforts and to bless him for all our trials? In a word, let us especially inquire from time to time whether we have under all circumstances walked as in his immediate presence, and labored to glorify his great and glorious name? "This, like Job, we should do continually;" and, like him also, we should occasionally set apart a day for more than ordinary self-examination, for deep humiliation on account of our innumerable sins and defects, and for a more earnest application to the blood of our great sin-atoning sacrifice to expiate the guilt of all sins, whether deliberate or unintentional, whether known or unknown.

2. To seek above all things the eternal welfare of our children.

It is undoubtedly a parent's duty to seek the comfortable settlement of his children in some good and useful occupation; but it is his duty also to seek above all things the salvation of their souls.

Consider, you who have families, that from you has been transmitted to your children a corrupt nature, which, if not changed by divine grace, will hurry them on to everlasting perdition! Surely then you are bound to seek this grace for them; you are bound to pray for them night and day; you are bound to restrain them also, and to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, [1 Samuel 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.13)."

Nor is it only in their earlier years that you are thus to watch over them, but in adult life; and if you neglect to do so, you will involve yourselves in the deepest guilt, and be justly answerable for them in the day of judgment, "their blood will be justly required at your hands."

In particular, be careful to instill into their minds high and reverential thoughts of God, and adoring gratitude to Christ for the atonement which he has made for sin and sinners. Teach them to go to that Savior continually, and to wash in the fountain of his blood—which alone can cleanse them from their sins.

Thus, whatever may be the outcome of your labors with respect to them, you will stand acquitted in your own conscience, and have a testimony from God in the last day that you have done the things which were pleasing in his sight, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter you into the joy of your Lord!"

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UNCHARITABLE JUDGMENT REPROVED

**[Job 1:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.9-11)**

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!"

Well has it been asked, "Who can stand before envy?" This vile principle of envy is as ingenious as it is malignant. Never is it at a loss for an occasion to display its hateful propensities. The very favor of God himself may call envy forth, and cause it to pierce the most innocent of men with its envenomed darts. Especially, if any person is made an object of honor, its odious qualities will instantly appear in an endeavor, if not to destroy the character of the person applauded—yet at least to reduce it to the standard of ordinary attainments.

In the chapter before us, Satan is represented as coming on a particular occasion into the presence of the Most High, and as being asked of God, whether he had considered what an eminently holy character Job was, insomuch "that there was not one like him upon earth, so perfect, so upright," so altogether conformed to the mind and will of God, verses 6-8. And what was the answer of this malignant fiend? It was in direct opposition to the divine testimony, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" No! He is a selfish hypocrite who serves God only because of the temporal advantages he gains by it; and, if those advantages were withdrawn, he would show he has no more regard for God than the vilest of mankind. Yes, he would even "curse God to his very face! verse 9-11."

Now, it is in this very way that envy operates, in reference to the saints, in all ages. They are represented as actuated by far different principles from those which they profess, and as possessing in reality no more of true sanctity than the world around them, "Do they fear God for nothing?" 'No; they have some selfish end in view; and, if they are disappointed in attaining that, they will prove themselves as destitute of any religious principle as those who make no profession of religion.'

It was in this sense that Satan put his challenge; and, therefore, we shall first direct our attention to it in that view. But we may take the words without any particular reference to the context; and then they will afford occasion for some observations of a very different nature. In both of these views, it is my intention to consider them, and to notice them:

I. As a base accusation, indignantly to be repelled.

How false the accusation was in reference to Job, the event proved; nor is it a whit more just as thrown out against the people of God in all ages. I grant there are, and ever have been, some, who are not upright before God. A Judas was among the immediate disciples of our Lord; and a Simon Magus among the early converts of his Apostles. But if there are some like Orpah, who cleaved to Naomi in her prosperity, but abandoned her when her name was changed to Marah, (when, from being "pleasant" her very existence became "bitter,") so are there many who, under all circumstances, "cleave unto the Lord," and adopt the resolution of pious Ruth, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me!" [Ruth 1:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.14-17)."

And why should the motives of the godly be called into question?

Is earthly prosperity so generally the portion of the godly, that hypocrites should be induced by the prospect of it to profess themselves the people of the Lord? For one, that is led by a hope of honor or emolument to embrace the religion of Christ, there are ten, at the least, who are deterred from professing it, by a fear of injuring their respectability or financial interests. Indeed, we are taught, by our blessed Lord, that "we must forsake all to follow him;" and, consequently, a desire after loaves and fish cannot reasonably be imputed to the general mass of Christians as their motive for professing godliness. We must look for other motives; and other motives there are, abundantly sufficient to produce the effects which we ascribe to them.

Are we not immortal beings, and accountable to Almighty God for the whole of our conduct? And is not the thought of this sufficient to impress the mind with awe, and to stimulate us to the utmost efforts, if, by any means, we may escape death, and lay hold on eternal life?

Has not God also, in tender mercy to our souls, sent unto us his only-begotten Son, to effect our reconciliation with him by his death on the cross? And is not this sufficient to show us at once the value of our souls, and the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come? May not such love on the part of our offended God be well expected to operate on our hearts, and to constrain us to devote ourselves altogether unto him? And while our lives accord with our profession, has anyone a right to sit in judgment upon our motives? And when no fault can be found with our actions, is anyone at liberty to incriminate our intentions?

If multitudes of God's people were upright in former ages, why should all who profess themselves his be accounted hypocrites now?

Were Noah, Daniel, Paul, induced by any sinister motives to serve their God? Did not their whole lives bear testimony to them that they were sincere? And is not the grace of God as sufficient for us as it was for them; so far at least as to inspire us with a holy fear of God, and a desire to serve him with our whole hearts?

I may go further, and ask, whether there are not many, even at this present day, evincing a superiority to all earthly good, and a determination to serve their God, though with the loss of all things?

I repel, then, and with indignation too, the base accusations that are so generally brought against the people of God; and I declare, without fear of contradiction, that at this day there are many who, though far inferior to Job in respect of spiritual attainments, resemble him fully in the integrity of their hearts; and many, of whom it may be justly said, They are "Israelites indeed, and without deceit."

But, as detached from the context, the words may be regarded,

II. As an unanswerable truth, most gladly to be conceded.

Selfishness is surely an evil, when it leads us to neglect spiritual things, and prefer those which are temporal; but, if understood as implying a supreme regard to our eternal interests, it is good and commendable; for it is that very disposition which was exercised by Mary, when she dismissed from her mind all inferior considerations, and chose that good part, which would never be taken away from her. In this sense Christians are selfish; and it may justly be said of them, that "they do not serve God for nothing!" For,

1. They desire, above all things, the salvation of their souls.

They know what they have done to offend their God, and what God has done to save them, and what promises of mercy he has given to all who repent and believe his Gospel. And knowing these things, they desire to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded to them, and to secure to themselves the offered benefits.

Is this wrong? If so, what can all the invitations and promises of the Gospel mean? Why did Peter say, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out!" Or why did our blessed Lord say, "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water?"

2. They actually obtain from God many present benefits.

By "coming to Christ, they find rest for their souls," and are "filled with peace and joy in believing;" and in this way they are encouraged to "fight the good fight of faith," and to "run with patience the race that is set before them." Is there anything evil in this? Does it not accord with the experience of the saints in all ages? Yes, does it not constitute a very strong argument in favor of godliness, that "it has the promise of the life that now is, as well at of that which is to come, [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8)."

3. They look forward to infinitely richer benefits in the world that is to come.

To those who seek after glory and honor and immortality, God has promised eternal life; and the saints, under their most afflictive trials, are pronounced blessed, because of the recompense that awaits them in the eternal world! [Matthew 5:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-12). Can it be wrong, then, to have respect to that reward, and to run with a view to obtain the prize?

Look at Moses; was not he actuated by this hope, when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt?" Yes, we are expressly told that "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)."

By the same hope were the ancient martyrs also actuated, when "they refused to accept deliverance from their tortures, in the assured expectation of obtaining a better resurrection, [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35)." And even of our blessed Lord himself is it said, that "for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross and despised the shame, until at last he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)."

Then I confess the truth contained in my text, that we are selfish; and my only complaint is, that we are not sufficiently impressed with these hopes and expectations; for, if we were, we would, like the holy Apostle, "forget all that is behind, and reach forward to that which is before, and press on with continually increasing ardor for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

To all the calumniated servants of God, then, would I say,

1. Do not be cast down by the evil censures of ungodly men.

Do what you will, they will be sure to find fault with you. Satan accused Job to God as a hypocrite, because of his prosperity; and, when he had prevailed to involve him in utter ruin, he stirred up Job's friends to condemn him as a hypocrite, because of his adversity.

Just so, when "John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking," Satan's agents said "he had a devil!" And when "Jesus came eating and drinking," they accused him as "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

Thus, "whether you pipe or mourn," they will find occasion against you, even as they did against David, who, "when he put on sackcloth, and fasted," to bring down blessings on his enemies, had even "that turned to his reproach."

Only be careful to give no just occasion of offence. Let your enemies be able to "find no fault in you, except concerning the Law of your God." Let it be the one labor of your life to "be blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life!" [Philippians 2:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.14-16)

2. Endeavor in all things to approve yourselves to God.

A contempt of man's censures should ever be attended with a determination of heart to "keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." You have seen what a testimony the heart-searching God bore to Job; seek that he may testify respecting you also, that you are "blameless and upright; fearing God and shunning evil." Be men of principle; and then you will be independent of outward things, and serve God as well in one state of life as another. Neither prosperity nor adversity will influence you in this respect; but, "whether God gives or takes away, you will bless his holy name." Then, if condemned by men, you may look forward with confidence to the future judgment, when "your righteousness shall shine forth as the noon-day," and "every tongue that has spoken against you shall be condemned!"

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TRIALS AND RESIGNATION OF JOB

**[Job 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.20-22)**

"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

Behold, the invisible world is here opened to our view. We here see an assembly of the sons of God, (whether of angels, or of glorified saints, is not certain,) and Satan himself intruding in among them, in the very presence of their God. We are informed also of a conversation passing between Jehovah and Satan in reference to Job; God commending him as the most eminent of the saints on earth; and Satan traducing his character, as a mercenary hypocrite, who would even curse his Maker to his face, if only he would be tempted to do so by a withdrawment of his temporal prosperity. We are told also that God permitted Satan to put the piety of Job to the test which he had proposed.

There would be no inconsistency in this, if we were to interpret it literally; but we apprehend that it is a kind of parabolic representation, like that of Micaiah, who saw in a vision a spirit coming into the presence of Jehovah, and proposing to go forth as a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, in order to persuade Ahab to go up to Ramoth-Gilead, [1 Kings 22:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.19-22). In this view it is intended to show us the malignity of Satan, and the restraints imposed upon him by Almighty God, who will allow him to proceed no further than shall ultimately lead to his own confusion.

In whichever way we take this account, whether literally or mystically, it appears that Satan was permitted to assault Job with the most grievous temptations, and that the piety of Job was victorious in the conflict. In considering this account of Job, we shall notice,

I. Job's trials.

These were beyond measure great.

Their number and variety;  
their rapid succession, without one moment allowed him for reflection and prayer;  
the extent of them, comprehending the loss not only of all his worldly property, but of all his children, and that too in a season of mirth, when he was peculiarly apprehensive that they might be least fit to die;  
and particularly the certainty of all these calamities, every one of them being reported by an eye-witness;  
all of these coming so suddenly, were sufficient to overwhelm anyone, more especially when the hand of God himself appeared, not in the language of the reporters only, but in the events themselves, to have been thus awfully directed against him.

In them we see,

1. How great the power of Satan is.

How speedily he found instruments to execute his will! The minds of Sabeans and Chaldeans received in a moment the impulse which he chose to give them; and they performed exactly the service to which he destined them; the time, the manner, the measure of their actions were perfectly subject to his control. The elements also were alike obedient to his command, and performed precisely what he directed them to effect; the lightnings flashed, the winds blew, and, by their ready compliance with his will, proclaimed him to be indeed "the god of this world," "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in all the children of disobedience."

True it is, he could not have done these things if God had not permitted him; but from what he did we may easily see what he both could and would do, if all restraint were withdrawn from him; and what he will do in the eternal world to those who shall be delivered into his hands.

2. How uncertain is all worldly good.

When Job arose in the morning, he was "the richest man in all the east;" and before night he was bereft of all that he possessed. And such changes are by no means infrequent in the world. Not to mention the restless desires of a gamester, the unfortunate speculations of a merchant, or the misplaced confidence of a surety, (all of which are fruitful sources of misery and ruin,) let us contemplate those other sources of calamity which are more out of the reach of human prudence, such as earthquakes, floods, shipwrecks, invasions, conflagrations. Alas! alas! how many thousands are from time to time reduced by these from a state of ease and opulence to the most abject and destitute condition! Truly there can be no one so ignorant as not to know, as well from observation as report, that "riches make themselves wings, and fly away!"

3. That the most eminent saints are not exempt from even the heaviest calamities!

If ever any man could venture to say, "I shall die in my nest, [Job 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.18)," it was Job; because, while he possessed more wealth than others, he had a mind more under the influence of piety, and consequently more free from those snares and temptations to which others are exposed. Yet, though there was no one like him upon earth in respect of piety, there never was a man so oppressed as he by overwhelming calamities. Let no man then ever venture to say, "My mountain stands fast; I shall not be moved;" for "all things come alike to all."

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, [Psalm 34:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.19)" as in the case of Job, God often sends troubles:  
to try and prove the sincerity of their faith,  
to strengthen their graces,  
to purify their hearts,  
to display before the world the efficacy of his grace,  
and to fit his people for the eternal world.

If God has given faith to any, they may expect that it shall "be tried, in order that it may be to the praise and honor and glory of their God at the appearing of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 1:7."

But in the midst of all his trials we behold, and admire,

II. Job's resignation.

He felt, and deeply too, the heavy load of his afflictions; and hence he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, as customary expressions of deep anguish of mind, [Genesis 37:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.29); [Genesis 37:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.34) with [Job 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.12) and [Isaiah 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.12) with [Micah 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 1.16). But still he was composed and tranquil, "not charging God foolishly," or uttering anything hasty or unadvised. Let us notice:

1. The considerations with which Job quieted his mind.

These were two, namely:  
1. that what he had lost, was not properly his own,  
2. that God had taken it, whose property it was.

Job felt himself now only reduced to the state in which he was when he came into the world, and in which he must at all events soon be, when he should be called to go out of the world again. Why then should he repine and murmur at being stripped of all, when he was so lately, and must so soon again be, altogether naked, without anything that he could properly call his own? So just and important is this idea, that Paul has actually quoted the very words of Job, to show that "godliness with contentment is the only desirable gain! [1 Timothy 6:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.7-9)."

Moreover, the use and enjoyment of those things had been given to him by God alone; whether they came by inheritance, or had been the fruits of his own industry, God was equally the giver of them, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17); and, whether men or devils or elements had deprived him of them, they were no other than as instruments in the hand of God, who had accomplished by them his own sovereign will, [Isaiah 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.7). [Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.6). How then could he presume to reply against God? No, "he would be silent and not open his mouth, because the Lord had done it."

What astonishing grace was here, that could suggest at a moment such thoughts as these, and give them such an efficacy to compose and tranquillize his soul!

But let us notice more particularly,

2. The manner in which Job expressed his resignation.

He "fell to the ground and worshiped" his God with the profoundest humility. O what submission of heart was here! How meekly did he receive at the Lord's hands the strokes of his chastening rod! But he went further still, and "blessed the name of the Lord!" Yes, blessed him for that very dispensation which Satan expected to have called forth only the language of cursing and blasphemy. Job was convinced in his judgment that "the Judge of all the earth could not but do right;" and that however "clouds and darkness might be round about him—yet judgment and justice were the basis of his throne." Job knew that whether he could see the reason of God's dealings now, or not, he should see reason to adore him for them in the eternal world; and therefore he would bless and adore him for them here. Thus did he adopt exactly the line of conduct which God approves, "neither despising the chastening of the Lord, on the one hand, nor fainting under his rebukes," on the other hand, [Hebrews 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.5). Job "walked by faith, and not by sight," and excelled all the saints, whether of that or any other age.

David was not the least eminent of men; yet when the Amalekites had invaded Ziklag, and taken away his wives and property, "he wept until he had no more power to weep, [1 Samuel 30:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.3-4)." And, when he lost his rebellious son Absalom, he so fainted under the loss as to be altogether forgetful of all his mercies, and of all his duties 2 Samuel 19:4-6.

But Job lost not for a moment his self-possession; his principles operated instantly to the full extent that the occasion required, "Shall we receive good at the hands of God," says he, "and shall we not receive evil? [Job 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.10)." Any other conduct appeared to him to be highly unreasonable; and hence he is proposed by God himself as a pattern for our imitation to the end of time, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11).

From contemplating Job's exalted character, let us **learn**,

1. To sit loose to earthly things.

We deny not but that a competency in earthly things is a blessing for which we have great reason to be thankful; but when we see how uncertain the possession of them is, and, above all, how happy we may be in God without them, we have no occasion to covet them, or to set our hearts upon them. Paul, when "he had nothing—yet possessed all things, [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)," because he had God for his God and portion.

Let us in like manner "learn in every state to be content, whether we are full or hungry, whether we abound or suffer need, [Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12)." Let us,  
"if we have a wife, be as though we had none;  
if we weep, be as if we wept not;  
if we rejoice, be as if we rejoiced not;  
if we buy, be as though we possessed not;  
and altogether use this world as not abusing it, because the fashion of it so quickly passes away! [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)."

2. To stand prepared for trials.

Truly we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth; what losses we may have in our property, or in our dearest friends and relatives; or what calamities may come upon us. We are sure that "Satan, that roaring lion," is "going to and fro throughout the earth," "seeking whom he may devour;" and, if he has obtained God's permission to exercise his power against us, how soon may he bring us down to the ground, and even "sift us as wheat!"

Who among us can have any idea what storms he may be preparing for us, or what instruments he may be stirring up against us? Knowing then his malignity and his power, let us stand upon our guard against him; let us "arm ourselves with the mind that was in Christ Jesus, [1 Peter 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.1);" and let us so endeavor to realize our principles, that we never give way to discontent or impatience, but bless in everything the name of our God.

3. To seek those things which neither men nor devils can take away from us.

Spiritual blessings are out of the reach of all our enemies, "Our life is hidden with Christ in God;" and not all the powers of darkness combined can destroy it. Moth and rust may corrupt our earthly treasures, or thieves may break through and steal them; but if we lay up treasure in Heaven, it will be inaccessible to them all. That is "substance, [Proverbs 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.21)," while all else is vanity and vexation of spirit. Let us then "labor for the food that endures to everlasting life;" and "choose the good part, that never can be taken away from us!"

#452

FRIENDLY SYMPATHY ILLUSTRATED

**[Job 2:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.11-13)**

"When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was."

Job in a second conflict, had gained the victory; yes, though his wife acted as a confederate with Satan, and urged him to "curse God and die," yet did he retain his integrity, and prove himself worthy of the character which God had given him.

But the rumor of his unprecedented calamities had spread far and wide, and had caused all those who should have been a comfort to him to depart from him; insomuch that, having none to administer to his relief, he had "taken a potsherd to scrape himself with."

But three of his aged friends, descendants of Abraham, though not of the chosen seed, still loved and honored him; and feeling their incompetence, as individuals, to afford him all the instruction and consolation that the occasion called for, concerted a plan to visit him together, and to unite their efforts for his welfare. An account of their first interview is here set before us; and a most interesting account it is. In discoursing upon it, we shall be led to contemplate,

I. The nature of love.

Love, as described by Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, and as summarily expressed by our blessed Lord, [Mark 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.31). [Matthew 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.12), is the acting in all things towards our neighbor as we would think it right that he, in our circumstances, would act towards us. It makes us to consider all men as members of one great body, and to participate with them in their feelings, as the different members of our own body would with each other, [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.25-26). If any are afflicted, love prompts us to fly to their relief, and to concert the best measures in our power for their restoration to happiness.

In the friends of Job we see the nature of love well exemplified; they did not feel indifferent about him, or run from him, as they did whose hearts were destitute of love; but they met together for the express purpose of participating and alleviating his sorrows. They did this, too, unsolicited, and unsought; it was the fruit of a divine principle within them, the voluntary expression of their own affectionate regards. This was a "love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth;" it was "a love without deception;" and wherever true love exists, it will produce exactly the same dispositions, and stimulate, according to its measure, to the same exertions.

In executing their benevolent plan, Job's friends have shown us,

II. The effects of sympathy.

When they were yet at some distance from him, they saw him; but would not have recognized him at all, (so altered was he in his whole appearance,) if they had not been prepared for the change by the reports which they had heard concerning him. But the sight deeply affected them all; so that they burst forth into floods of tears, and rent their mantles, as expressive of their anguish, and sprinkled dust upon their heads towards Heaven, as mourners were accustomed to do. On coming into his immediate presence, "they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights," that is, a considerable part of each successive day, see [Luke 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.37) and [Acts 20:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.31); and so overwhelmed were they with the sight of his melancholy condition, that none of them could give utterance to their feelings, or attempt to suggest anything for his relief.

Those who have never known from their own experience how entirely the soul may be overwhelmed with sympathy, conjecture that during all this time the friends of Job were harboring suspicions which they did not dare to express. But this idea is very injurious to the character of those holy men, and directly contrary to the account given in our text; for their silence is expressly ascribed to the overpowering effect of their own sympathy at the sight of his unparalleled afflictions, "No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was" and to this cause it must be ascribed.

We know, that as silence is the proper effect of great sorrow," (David says, "I am so troubled that I cannot speak, [Psalm 77:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.4),") so is it also of deep sympathy; such as the elders of the daughters of Zion experienced, when they saw their city and temple destroyed, their princes and people carried into captivity, the law of their God forgotten, and their prophets no longer favored with visions from the Lord, [Lamentations 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 2.9-11).

In a word, the effect of sympathy is, to make the sorrows of another our own; and to produce in our hearts those very feelings of grief and anguish, which the afflicted individual himself is called to sustain.

The interview, thus illustrated, displays,

III. The excellence of true religion.

The whole of true religion is comprehended under the term love, "Love is the fulfilling of the law, [Romans 12:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.8-10)." Moreover, the sympathy before delineated, is the most unequivocal expression of love, "Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27)."

See then religion as exemplified in our text, how beautiful does it appear! A carnal mind would admire rather a sight of kings surrounded by their nobles; but God and his holy angels, I have no doubt, esteem such a sight as was exhibited on that occasion, as infinitely grander than all the pomp of courts, yes than of "Solomon in all his glory."

Never did our Lord himself appear more glorious, no not even on the mount of transfiguration, than when he was weeping with sympathy at the tomb of Lazarus, or with compassion over the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem. So the sight of these aged men, assembled to mourn with, and to comfort, their afflicted brother, and expressing in such significant ways their overwhelming sorrow, was as noble and as interesting as can be seen on earth.

And O, what would this world be, if everyone possessed such a spirit as they evinced! Yet such is the tendency of true religion, which transforms us into the image of that God, whose name and nature is love.

By way of **improvement**, we will,

1. Recommend to you the exercise of these dispositions.

Behold these men, how amiable they appear in all the posture and habiliments of woe! And are they not a fit pattern for you to imitate? But you have a brighter pattern than they, even our Lord Jesus Christ himself; who, when he saw our fallen state, came down from Heaven to seek and save us, yes, "though rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich!" O, what marvelous grace was here! and still, "as our Great High-priest, he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been himself in all things tempted like as we are, on purpose that he might support them that are tempted."

If then the example of Job's friends are not sufficient to commend to you these lovely dispositions, let me entreat you to seek "the mind that was in Christ." As a further inducement to this, consider how soon you yourselves may need the compassion and the sympathy of others.

There is no man so secure, but he is open to the assaults of trouble on every side. Would you then in trouble have any to sympathize with you? Know, that "he who would have friends must show himself friendly, [Proverbs 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.24);" and that you must sow the grain which you desire to reap.

This is an argument used by God himself, who bids us to "remember those who are in bonds, as bound with them; and those who suffer adversity, as being ourselves also in the body, [Hebrews 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.3)."

If any further motive be wanted, consider, that in the day of judgment the exercise of this disposition will be a very principal subject of inquiry, as evincing the sincerity of our love to Christ; and every act of love towards the poorest of his people will be acknowledged by him as a favor conferred upon himself, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40). Let me then recommend the exercise of love and sympathy to all who would adorn their holy profession now, or be approved of their God in that great and solemn day.

2. Suggest some cautions in relation to it.

Do not let sympathy be shown with the rich only, or with our own particular friends; but let it be extended to all who are in trouble, whether rich or poor, whether known or unknown, [Job 30:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 30.25). We deny not but that those who are nearly related to us have a superior claim; as they have also who are of the household of faith, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10); but still we must, like the good Samaritan, account every man our neighbor, and gladly avail ourselves of every opportunity of pouring balm into his wounded spirit.

Again, wait not until you are called and summoned to the house of mourning; but go there of your own accord, esteeming it "far better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting, [Ecclesiastes 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.2); [Ecclesiastes 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.4)." Let the principle of love in you be like a spring, ever ready to act, the moment that a scope for action is afforded it. "Look not every man on his own things only, but every man also on the things of others, [Philippians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4) with [2 Corinthians 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.29)." Be ready on all occasions to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep [Romans 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.15)." This readiness to "bear one another's burdens is a fulfilling of the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

But lastly, be not hasty to offer advice to those who are bowed down with a weight of trouble. There is a sacredness in grief which demands our reverence; and the very habitation of a mourner must be approached with awe. A hasty effusion even of consolatory truths is offensive to one who is not prepared in a measure for the reception of them. The language of many is, "Look away from me; I will weep bitterly; labor not to comfort me, [Isaiah 22:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.4);" and to such, an obtrusive officiousness is disgusting. To such, the silent eloquence of sighs and tears is more consolatory than the most copious harangue.

See that you yourselves feel deeply; and then you will neither fall into an officious impertinence, on the one hand, nor deem even a silent visit unserviceable, on the other hand. You will patiently wait for the most favorable season, and administer your instructions as the mourner is able to receive them.

#453

JOB CURSES THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH

**[Job 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 3.1)**

"After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth!"

It is worthy of observation, that the most eminent saints mentioned in the sacred records are reported, not only to have sinned, but to have failed in those very graces for which they were most distinguished. Abraham, the father of the faithful, who is set forth as the great pattern for all future believers, repeatedly denied his wife through the influence of unbelief; and Moses, the meekest of all men upon the face of the earth, spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and thereby provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan. Of the patience of Job the Scripture speaks in the highest terms; but, behold, he is here set forth to our view in a state of grievous impatience. Let us consider,

I. The manner in which Job expressed his impatience.

It would seem as if Satan had now assaulted Job, not his body only, but his soul also, and had succeeded in wounding him with his fiery darts! It is probable too, that the continued silence of his friends had produced an unfavorable impression on his mind. But however these things might be,

He vented his complaints in very unfitting terms.

He first cursed the day of his birth, wishing it to be marked, both by God in his providence, and by men in their feelings, as a day of darkness and gloominess, even to the latest generations verse 3-10. He next expressed his regret, that he had not been left to perish as soon as he came out of the womb; seeing that he would then have escaped all his calamities, and been quiet in the tomb, where all of every class, whatever their situations and circumstances were while they were living upon earth, are enjoying equal repose, verses 11-19. And, lastly, he complained that while his grievous sufferings tormented him beyond measure, they did not prevail to take away his life, verses 20-26.

We have a similar instance of impatience in another eminent saint, the Prophet Jeremiah, who seems almost to have adopted the very expressions in the chapter before us, [Jeremiah 20:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 20.14-18).

Alas! how weak a creature is man when left in any measure to himself!

But is this an uncommon line of conduct?

No, truly; there is the same spirit in every man, ready to break forth whenever any afflictive occasion occurs; and in too many of us it breaks forth almost without any occasion at all. How little a thing will discompose the minds of the generality! How small a provocation will cause them to vent their displeasure in angry and opprobrious language! If trials are at all heavy and of long continuance, how will they disquiet our minds, and destroy all the comfort of our lives! Is it an uncommon thing for men under some calamity to feel weary of their existence, and even to entertain thoughts of terminating their sorrows by suicide? Yes, multitudes who have not one-tenth of Job's trials, actually destroy their own lives, and rush headlong into Hell itself, in order to get rid of their present troubles!

While then we lament the imperfections of this holy man, let us turn our eyes inwards, and contemplate the prevalence of our own corruptions, which a single loss, or disappointment, or injury—is sufficient to call forth in their utmost extent.

Having viewed the impatience of Job, let us notice,

II. Some observations arising from Job's impatience.

We may justly notice,

1. The folly of arraigning the providence of God.

Had Job been able to see the design of God in that dispensation towards him, (as sent in the purest love,) and the end in which it was soon to issue, (his greatly augmented happiness and prosperity,) had he contemplated the benefit that was to arise from it to his own soul (both in present sanctification and in eternal glory,) and to the Church of God in all ages, (in having such an example of sufferings and patience set before them)—he would never have uttered such complaints as these; he would have acknowledged then, what he afterwards so clearly saw, that "the Judge of all the earth did right!"

Just so, if *we* would look to the final outcome of our trials—then we would bear them all, whether little or great, with resignation and composure.

We see Jacob complaining, "All these things are against me!" and yet at last find, that the loss he so deplored was the salvation of him and all his family; it was a link in the chain of providence to accomplish God's gracious purposes in the preservation of the chosen seed, and ultimately in the redemption of the world, by Him who was to spring from the loins of Judah. Just so, if we saw everything as God does, we would see that the very trials of which we complain are sent by God as the best means of effecting the everlasting salvation of our souls; and we would unite in the testimony of David, that "God in very faithfulness has caused us to be afflicted!"

Let us be contented to leave everything to the disposal of an all-wise God; assured that "He does all things well!" And let us say with Job in the midst of his grievous afflictions, "Though he slay me—yet will I trust in him!"

2. The inability of Satan to prevail against the Lord's people.

Satan had hoped that he should instigate Job to "curse God to his face;" but in this he was disappointed. Job did indeed "curse the day of his birth;" but never for a moment thought of cursing his God. On the contrary, he often spoke of God in the most honorable and reverential terms. But Satan is a chained adversary; he can prevail no further than God sees fit to permit him. He could not have done anything against Job, if he had not first obtained permission from God. Neither can Satan do anything against the least of God's people, any further than God is pleased to allow him with a view to their eternal good. Satan "desired to sift Peter as wheat;" but the intercession of Christ preserved his servant from being finally overcome. "Satan is a roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour;" but he cannot seize on one of the lambs of Christ's flock. They are kept in safety by the Good Shepherd; and "none can pluck them out of his hand!" God has provided for his people, "armor, by means of which they shall be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand, [Ephesians 6:10-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10-18)." Nor do the more aged and experienced alone defeat him, "the young men also overcome him, [1 John 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.13-14)," yes, all that are begotten of God are enabled so to "resist him, that he flees from them, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7)," and "touches them not, [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.18)." He may be permitted to tempt and try us, [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10); but he is a vanquished enemy, [John 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.31), and "shall be bruised under our feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

3. The necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come!

There is a period fast approaching, when all the ungodly will be reduced to a state infinitely more calamitous than that of Job! They will indeed then, and with justice too, "curse the day of their birth;" for it would, as our Lord himself testifies, be "better for them that they had never been born."

O what a day of darkness awaits them—a day wherein there will not be one ray of light to cheer their souls! Then will they curse and "blaspheme God, because of the plagues that he inflicts upon them! [Revelation 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.9); [Revelation 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.11)." They will wish for death also, and "call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them! [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.15-17);" but all in vain.

Now if we were informed that only such troubles as Job's were coming upon us, what diligence would we use to avert them! How careful should we be to preserve our property, and to guard against the disorders with which we were threatened! Not a moment would be lost by us, nor would we decline the use of any means, to ward off such awful calamities.

How earnest then should we be in fleeing from the wrath to come! Think, brethren, what a fearful thing it will be to "fall into the hands of the living God!" and to "be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone!" "where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched! [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48) with [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11)."

O delay not one moment to flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel; flee to Christ, as the city of refuge, where, notwithstanding all your past iniquities, you may find perfect rest and security. Do not put off the great work of your souls to a time of sickness and trouble; such a season is but ill calculated for so great a work. Look at Job; if he had neglected his soul hitherto, how incapable would he have then been of performing those offices of repentance and faith, which require all the energies of the mind! He could not even compose his mind to bear his affliction aright; much less could he have employed that season in calling his past ways to remembrance, and in turning unto God with all his heart.

Just so, we also shall find it quite enough to bear up under the pains or weakness of a dying hour. Let us then improve the time of health and prosperity in preparing for the eternal world, where neither sin nor sorrow shall no more molest us, but we shall be forever happy in the bosom of our God!

#454

ELIPHAZ REPROVES JOB

**[Job 4:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.12-19)**

"A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it. Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice:

"Can a mortal be more righteous than God?  
 Can a man be more pure than his Maker?  
 If God places no trust in His servants,  
 if He charges His angels with error,  
 how much more those who live in houses of clay,  
 whose foundations are in the dust,  
 who are crushed more readily than a moth!"

The controversy on the part of Job's friends is here begun; and Eliphaz leads the way. He begins with acknowledging Job's former usefulness in alleviating the sorrows of others, but turns it into a ground of accusation against him for not bearing with more fortitude his own sorrows. The testimony however was most honorable to Job; for we can scarcely conceive a more honorable character, than that of one who, possessing all the influence of wealth, and power, and wisdom, employs it all in instructing and comforting the sons and daughters of affliction; and we cannot be surprised that, when Eliphaz was so well acquainted with the benevolent exertions of Job, he did not in his own conduct pay greater attention to his example. It is evident, that he did not duly estimate the calamities of Job; not feeling them in his own person, he was not aware of their weight and pressure; else he never could have spoken so lightly of his affliction, as to say, "It touches you, and you are troubled;" and then to make his confidence a subject of derision.

But let us come to the argument with which Eliphaz thought to confound Job, "Who ever perished, being innocent?" This was the ground on which all Job's friends proceeded; they maintained, that his sufferings were a certain proof of his having committed some enormous wickedness, which God was now punishing. From appealing thus to observation and experience, Eliphaz proceeds to mention a revelation which he had received from Heaven, and which, in his opinion, strongly confirmed the opinions he had delivered.

I. This revelation we shall now consider **abstractedly**.

The circumstance of so remarkable a vision having been given to Eliphaz, in order to fix his attention the more deeply on the instruction conveyed with it, clearly shows that the revelation delivered to him was of great importance. The very terror also which the vision inspired, led him, and should lead us also, to regard every word that was spoken with reverence and godly fear. As he trembled at the sight, so should we "tremble at the word."

But we must not so understand the word as if it imported only that man is not more just or more pure than God; for such a truth as that needed no revelation to make it known; it was obvious to all, and acknowledged by all, without any such confirmation as this.

The truths intended to be made known, were these:

1. That no man is pure before God.

Man is a weak and sinful creature; his very nature is corrupt; and therefore, whatever superiority to others he may possess in point of dispositions or conduct, he must shut his mouth, and acknowledge himself guilty before God, [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19). Having once violated God's law in anyone particular, (and it is as much violated by defect as by actual transgression,) he is condemned by it, and must to all eternity confess himself a just object of God's displeasure. Job himself, notwithstanding some apparent inconsistency in his assertions, was convinced of this, and expressed it too in very strong terms, [Job 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2-3); [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21); [Job 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-31); just as it is elsewhere declared in Holy Scripture [Psalm 143:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.2).

Even the angels themselves are not so perfect, but that they are capable of committing sin, precisely as the fallen angels did; nor are they so intelligent, but that they would be guilty of the most egregious folly, if a work like that of governing the world were entrusted to them for one single hour. God therefore "can put no trust in them;" and if "he charges even them with folly," in what light must he view the fallen man? Truly no descendant of Adam can have any pretensions to wisdom or to purity in his sight.

2. That no man can claim anything at the hands of God.

If we had done all that is commanded us, we must acknowledge ourselves to be only "unprofitable servants;" "we must have done no more than was our duty to do." The same must be said of the holy angels, no one of whom ever rendered unto God either more or better service than was his duty to perform. All idea of merit must be excluded as well from them as from us; and it is beyond measure surprising that anyone should be found among men so ignorant, so conceited, so presumptuous, as to conceive that God can by any means be made his debtor. Instead of laying God under an obligation by anything that we can do, we ourselves are indebted to him for that grace whereby we are enabled to do any good thing, and are more abundantly indebted to him in proportion to the good which he has enabled us to perform.

3. That no man under any circumstances can have reason to complain of God.

We will suppose a man to be as "perfect and upright" as Job himself; we will suppose him too to suffer as severely as ever Job suffered; and that too without any previous warning, or any assignable cause; would he have any right to complain? We answer, No! if his sufferings were a thousand times heavier, even as Hell itself, he would have no right to complain; because, as a sinner, he is justly liable to the everlasting wrath of God. "Shall a living man complain?" says Solomon. No surely. If he were dead and in Hell itself, he would have no other than his just portion; and consequently, anything short of Hell is a ground rather for thankfulness than complaint.

This we apprehend to be the import of our text, abstractedly considered; but it will be proper to notice our text,

II. This revelation we shall now consider as tending to decide the controversy between Job and his friends.

Eliphaz thought that his speech was admirably calculated to decide the point; and so it really was, if only it had been viewed in its proper light. Let us consider it,

1. As the vision was applied by Eliphaz.

Eliphaz, as we have already observed, thought that Job was suffering on account of some great and hidden abominations; and that, if he had not committed some enormous wickedness, God was too just to punish him in so signal away. Hence he argued thus: If a just man would not deal thus with an innocent person, how much less will God? "Shall mortal man be more just than God, and more pure than his Maker?" This is impossible; and therefore Job must be a hypocrite; and God has given me this vision on purpose that I may convince him of his hypocrisy.

But all this was erroneous; the principle itself was false; and the application of it altogether unwarranted. It was not true that God always punishes great wickedness in this life; for "all things come alike to all;" and the wicked are often the most prosperous. Nor was it true that Job, previous to these calamities, had committed any such evils as they apprehended; for God himself had testified that he was perfect. Therefore, notwithstanding all his confidence, Eliphaz erred exceedingly in his interpretation of this vision.

2. As the vision **ought**to have been applied.

The vision had respect to the controversy; and so far Eliphaz was right; but it was not a reference to Job alone; and there Eliphaz was mistaken. It referred to all the parties, to the friends of Job as well as to Job himself.

To *Job* it spoke powerfully, reproving him for complaining of his afflictions; because all discontent with the dispensations of God does, in fact, impeach his wisdom, and his justice in the government of the world. But "shall man be more just than God, or wiser than he who charges even the angels with folly?" This cannot be; and therefore Job was to be blamed for murmuring against God.

But to Job's friends it spoke also. They took for granted that, if Job was not a hypocrite, then God must have been unjust in so afflicting him. But were they able to fathom all the counsels of the Almighty, and to sit in judgment upon God? Were they wiser, and more just, than he? Or was he bound to conform his proceedings to their opinion of what was wise and just? No! they should learn therefore not to pronounce so positively upon things which were so far beyond their comprehension; they must not presume to set up their own justice as a standard, whereby to try the justice of their God; and their own wisdom, whereby to estimate the wisdom of their God. To act as they were acting, was uncharitable to their friend, and insulting to their God; and they, no less than Job, should wait for the outcome of these calamities; assured that the wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of God would at last be fully manifested in the whole of this most mysterious dispensation.

Eliphaz was partial in his interpretation of the vision; he saw its bearing upon Job; but overlooked its application to himself. And this is indeed a too common fault in hearing the Word of God. We see it as applicable to our neighbor; but we do not hold it up as a looking-glass wherein to behold ourselves; we hear for others, and not for ourselves; and thus make it an occasion rather for uncharitable censures than for personal humiliation. Let us mark this evil in Eliphaz, and watch against it in ourselves.

Improvement.

1. Be thankful to God for the written Word.

Formerly God made known himself to men in dreams and visions, and by voices and ministering spirits; but these communications were accompanied with terror, and, as in the instance before us, not easy to be seen in all their bearings.

But in the written word we have a full revelation of God's mind and will, that we may consult at all times; that we may have recourse to without any fear or terror; and that we may both clearly and fully understand; because if one part is dark and intricate, we may compare it with another that is more simple; and so, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, may learn more certainly the mind of God.

Besides, in the written word there are great leading principles, which will serve to throw light upon any point that is more obscure. If anything appears contrary to the analogy of faith, we have a standard both of faith and practice whereby to try it; and may thus, for the most part, have our doubts respecting it removed. Let us be thankful then for such an inestimable treasure! Let us study the Word, not as critics merely, or as controversialists to condemn others—but as people desirous of discovering their own faults, and of conforming themselves in everything to the mind and will of God.

2. We must ever bear in mind the infinite distance between us and our holy Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

He is the great, the incomprehensible God!

You are poor sinful worms crushed before the moth!

He is the eternal and infinitely wise God!

"You are of yesterday, and know nothing!"

Get but a proper understanding of the infinite distance between you and God, and you will take your proper place at His footstool.

You will receive whatever He shall speak in His blessed Word, with humility and confidence.

You will trust Him for acting with unerring wisdom and goodness, even when His dispensations are most dark and mysterious.

You will be submissive to His chastisements, and obedient to His will as revealed in His Word.

Your insignificance as creatures will constrain you to bow before Him, and to say, "He is the LORD! let Him do what is good in His eyes." [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)

Your vileness as sinners will make you to regard every mercy you enjoy with unbounded gratitude; and especially that greatest of all mercies—the gift of his only dear Son to die for your sins.

With what wonder and admiration you will embrace His astonishing salvation.

With what simplicity of mind you will live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

With what zeal and diligence you will devote yourselves to His service!

We say again: If only God is exalted in your eyes, and you are abased in the dust—then God will be glorified, and your souls be blessed both in time and eternity!

#455

THE SECURITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

**[Job 5:19-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19-27)**

"From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you. In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword. You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes. You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth. For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace with you. You will know that your tent is secure; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing. You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth. You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season. "We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself."

The friends of Job were men of undoubted piety, and of very deep and extensive knowledge in the things of God. Unhappily they had taken up an erroneous principle in relation to the dealings of God with men in this world; and from that error proceeded all their accusations of Job, together with a continual misapplication of the sublimest truths. This distinction we must ever bear in mind; their general views of divine truth were most sublime and glorious; it was only the particular point of doctrine respecting divine providence in which they were mistaken, and in which their opinions are not to be depended on.

This very speech of Eliphaz is repeatedly quoted in other parts of Scripture as of divine authority. Solomon adopts one part of it, [Proverbs 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.11); Paul quotes different parts, 1 Corinthians 3:19. [Hebrews 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.5); James also refers to it, [James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.12); [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11); we may therefore safely regard the promises recorded in our text as the declarations of God himself; more especially as there is not one expression in them which is not confirmed by a variety of other passages of Holy Writ.

Indeed Eliphaz himself lays singular stress upon them, declaring, from the deepest "search," his full conviction of their truth; and urging a reliance on them as a most infallible source of "good." Regarding them therefore in this light, we shall endeavor to explain, confirm, and improve them.

I. To **explain** the statements of Eliphaz.

These statements are very **great** and **comprehensive**.

They ensure to every believing soul a full deliverance from all evil. Evils may arise in quick succession, not only "six or seven," but to an indefinite extent. The pressure of famine and the calamities of war may be felt by him as well as others; and the scourge of calumny may be directed against him in a more peculiar and exclusive manner. But he shall find such interpositions of God in his favor, either for his exemption from the trial, or for his support under it—as shall sufficiently distinguish him from all others.

In the very midst of the trials he shall feel himself like a man in an impregnable fortress, who "laughs at" the efforts of his bitterest foes. So chained shall all his enemies appear, that he shall feel as if the very "stones of the field were in league with him" not to wound his foot, and "the beasts of the field" not to open their mouths against him.

The same sweet assurance also is given to him as to an enjoyment of all comfort. Not only is his mind at peace in relation to his own personal concerns; he has equal composure in reference to those of a domestic nature. While he sees his family growing up around him, he knows that they also are under the protection of an all-wise Providence; and that no evil shall befall them. If he "visits his habitation," he has no fear that he shall find his family overwhelmed with troubles, or that he shall be disappointed in his hopes of seeing them in "peace" and safety. Nor is it in life only that he is thus blessed, but in death also; to which he shall be brought, when ripe for glory, as a shock of corn, fully fit for the granary of Heaven!

These statements must however be understood with limitations and restrictions.

Though "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, 1 Timothy 4:8," we are not to imagine, that the temporal promises of the Old Testament are on the same precise footing with those which relate to things spiritual and eternal. Grace and glory are secured to the believer at all events; while temporal prosperity is secured only so far as shall ultimately conduce to his eternal welfare. To this extent the promises are equally sure; but where the benefit of the soul will be most promoted by circumstances that are painful to flesh and blood, the lesser good gives way to the greater good; and God, as a wise Parent, sends us that which he knows to be most for our eternal good.

If we do not thus restrict the promises of temporal happiness, we shall be at a loss to account for all the trials that have befallen the saints from the time of Abel until this present hour; but, with that solution, there is not, nor ever has been, the smallest difference between the promises of God's Word, and the dispensations of his providence.

The promises in our text being thus explained, we proceed,

II. To **confirm** the statements of Eliphaz.

The whole of Scripture bears testimony to the truth of them:

1. Search the **Law**.

Precisely the same promises were made to the Jewish people, if only they would serve their God in sincerity and truth, [Leviticus 26:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.3-12).

2. Search the **Prophets**.

Not to dwell on each individual promise, we may find the whole collected together in one psalm by the sweet singer of Israel, [Psalm 91:1-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.1-16).

3. Search the **New Testament**.

Not only are we told in general that "God is faithful, and will not allow his people to be tempted above what they are able, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)," but we find the Apostle actually applying to himself the promises of God to the full extent that they are specified in the text, [2 Timothy 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.18), and actually glorying over all the enemies that might be supposed capable of interfering with their accomplishment, [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39).

In a word, the promises which we have been considering are confirmed by the uniform tenor of the Holy Scriptures; and "they are sure to all" who truly rely upon them, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16).

Convinced of the truth of these promises, we are now only concerned,

III. To **improve** the statements of Eliphaz.

Nothing can exceed the importance of them; since they most forcibly teach us:

1. Submission in trials.

Be it so, that our afflictions are great and manifold.

We have no reason for complaint, when we know that our afflictions are all ordered in number, measure, and duration—for our best and greatest good, according to the counsels of infinite wisdom and love!

We have no reason for complaint when we are assured that our afflictions are the very things which we would choose for ourselves, if we saw the outcome of them as clearly as God sees it!

It is in this very view that the promises are introduced, namely, to pacify the mind of Job, and to reconcile him to the afflictions which he was called to sustain, verse 17, 18; and, if once we are convinced that God is fulfilling to us the promises of his Word, we shall receive even the most painful dispensations as blessings in disguise! See [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18). [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7).

2. Confidence in supplications.

What will he who unsolicited "has given us such exceeding great and precious promises," refuse to our earnest petitions? The very end for which he gave these precious promises was, "that by them we might be partakers of the divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)," and be enabled "to perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)." Can we ask for anything more than this? If we can conceive of anything beyond, he says, "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you," yes, he teaches us to expect that he will do for us exceeding abundantly "above all that we can ask or think."

Let us then "draw near to him in full assurance of faith."

Let "open our mouths wide, that he may fill them."

Let us say to him in the confidence of a successful outcome, "I will not let you go, except you bless me."

3. Activity in obedience.

Who can hear such promises as God has made to us in our text, and not say, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" Can any "commandment be grievous," that proceeds from him? If dissuaded from any exertion or any sufferings for his sake, should we not instantly reply, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die" the most cruel death for so unspeakably gracious and good a God! [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13). My brethren, let this unbounded "love of His constrain you to live no more unto yourselves, but wholly and unreservedly to him." Then indeed will this grace of God have produced its due effect, and, as Eliphaz intimates in our text, we shall have "heard and known it for our good."

#456

MAN'S TIME ON EARTH FIXED

**[Job 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.1)**

"Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?  
 Are not his days like those of a hired man?"

The precise connection of these words is not very clear; nor, as far as the sense of them is concerned, is it of any great importance to inquire respecting it. It should seem that Job, having been reproved by his friend Eliphaz for expressing too strongly and too impatiently his wish for death to terminate his troubles, here vindicates himself by an appeal to him, that, if a hired man looks forward with comfort to the rest that awaits him after his labors, then much more may Job desire rest under his great and accumulated afflictions.

But, waving any further consideration of this, I will endeavor to show:

I. What these questions import.

Wherever appeals are made to man in the inspired volume, we may be sure that the things asserted are true, and that they are deserving of particular attention. Those which present themselves to our notice in the text plainly imply:

1. That man's time on earth is fixed by God himself.

The time of our birth is fixed by Him who formed us in the womb, and breathed into our nostrils the breath of life. Our continuance, also, in life is fixed. No man can deprive us of life until our appointed time is come. Nor can any man protract his existence upon earth one moment, when the appointed period of his dissolution has arrived. "No man," says Solomon, "has power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither has he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war, [Ecclesiastes 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 8.8)." No, "his days are determined, the number of his months are with God, who has appointed his bounds, which he cannot pass, [Job 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.5)." "Our times are altogether in God's hands! [Psalm 31:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.15);" and "all the days of our appointed time must we wait, until our change comes, [Job 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.14)."

2. That during that time we have a **work** to do, and a **warfare** to maintain.

The word, "our appointed time," is, in the margin, translated "our warfare." The same word occurs in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, and is there translated, "warfare;" "Her warfare is accomplished;" and there the marginal reading is, "appointed time, [Isaiah 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.2)." Without determining which is preferable here, we will include both.

We have a work to do, even "as a hired man," who labors in the field. To serve our God, and to seek the salvation of our souls, are the great ends of life. In this work we must engage, not as laborers only, but as soldiers also; for we have corrupt propensities which must be mortified, and powerful adversaries that must be withstood. Our conflicts with these may well be called a "warfare;" for, indeed, we can never hope to overcome them, if we do not go forth to the combat, "in the strength of Christ, and do not put on the whole armor of God, [Ephesians 6:10-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10-18)."

During the whole period of our abode on earth this warfare must be maintained; nor must we ever put off our armor until our victory is complete. It cannot be supposed that God has sent us into the world merely to please and gratify ourselves, like the rich fool who said, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry!" There is not a hired man who does not know that he has some work assigned to him, nor a soldier who does not expect that he will have some conflicts to sustain; and every Christian must regard himself as invested with these characters, and, as of necessity, called to the performance of these duties.

3. That, at the expiration of that time, God will give us a recompense according to our works.

The hired man expects his pay, and the soldier expects his discharge, when they have completed the term for which they were engaged, and fulfilled the offices to which they were appointed. And we, also, may look forward, even as Moses did, to "a recompense of reward, [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26)," which our Divine Master will surely give to all his faithful servants.

Doubtless, whatever our labors or our conflicts are, it is "not a reward of debt, but a reward of grace, [Romans 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.4)," that we are to hope for; but still God has graciously pledged himself that "our labor shall not be in vain, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58);" and he would even esteem himself "unrighteous, if he were to forget the works and labors of love which we have performed for his name's sake, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10)."

The import of the interrogations being sufficiently clear, let me point out,

II. What these questions suggest to every reflecting mind.

Whole volumes would not suffice for a full statement of this part of our subject. To mention only what is most obvious, they suggest:

1. That we should perform our appointed work with diligence.

We expect a hired man or a soldier to do this. If they were unmindful of their calling, or loitered in it, we would account them worthy of reproof. But their offices, however important, are not to be compared with those which we have to discharge; theirs relate to time and to mortals like ourselves; but ours relate to God and to eternity. Let us, then, at the commencement of every day, ask ourselves, "What have I to do for God and for my own soul this day?" And "whatever our hand finds to do, let us do it with all our might, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

2. That we should sustain the trials that are allotted to us with patience.

There are trials in every situation of life, and especially in those which expose us to great fatigue and danger. No hired man or soldier expects to escape them. They are regarded as necessarily attached to the offices which such people have to perform.

And can we hope to escape them; we, whose work is so arduous, and whose warfare is so continued? We should be prepared for them, and have our minds fore-armed against them; and, bearing in mind who it is that has appointed them, and what he deserves at our hands—we should welcome every trial as a means of displaying our attachment to him, and of honoring that God whose servants we are.

3. That we may look forward to our dismissal from the body as a season much to be desired.

This, perhaps, is the primary idea intended in the text. At all events, the hired man welcomes the rest and recompense which await him after the labors of the day, just as the soldier does his discharge after a long and dangerous campaign.

What then should we do, whose rest will be so glorious, and whose recompense so great? Can we think of the approbation of our God, and not pant for the time when we shall hear him say. "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!" Can we survey all the glory and felicity of Heaven, and the crowns and kingdoms that await us there, and not long for the period when we shall be invested with them? Paul "desired to depart, and to be with Christ, [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23)," yes, and "groaned in spirit" for the time, "when, the earthly house of this tabernacle being dissolved, he should possess a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! [2 Corinthians 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1-3).

We, then, may exercise the same holy disposition; not, indeed, through weariness of life, but through desire of beholding our God face to face. Our wish must be, not merely to be freed from the storms and tempests of this present world, but "to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life! 2 Corinthians 5:4.

In a review of this subject:

1. We find matter for **humiliation**.

What if a hired man employed by us had performed his work, from day to day, as we have ours; of what reward should we account him worthy? Or, if a soldier in our army had discharged his duties as we have ours; what recompense would he receive at the hands of his commander?

Our zeal and diligence ought to have far exceeded those of the most industrious laborer and the most devoted soldier upon earth. Ah, brethren, the very best among us has need to weep in the review of all his past life, and even of the very best day that he ever spent, and the best services that he ever rendered. Arise, I beg you, to your duty; and redeem, as much as possible, the time you have lost.

What advice would you give to a man who was under sentence of condemnation, even though two or three months were yet to intervene before the execution of his sentence? Take that advice to yourselves, and follow it; and pray mightily to God, that your appointed time, whether it be short or long, may be so improved, as you will wish you had improved it, when you shall come to die.

2. We find matter for **encouragement**!

Had we to perform our work in our own strength, or to "carry on our warfare at our own cost," then we might well despair. But it is not so. The Spirit of the living God has promised to us, to "help our infirmities;" and "he who has begun the good work in us has engaged to perfect it until the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)."

Count not, then, your difficulties or your dangers, as though they were too great for you to encounter. Only go forth in the strength of Christ, and you may say to all of them, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)."

Your weakness, if only you feel it as you ought, should rather be an occasion of satisfaction than of despondency; since, "when you are weak, then shall you be strong; and Christ's strength shall be perfected in your weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10)." After all, who can tell how few your conflicts may be? Perhaps your appointed time is already so near a close, that you have but a few days or hours to live. Be this as it may, "let your loins be girt, and your lamps trimmed, as those who wait for the coming of their Lord; that, at whatever hour he shall come, he may find you watching." "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch!"

#457

BILDAD WARNS JOB OF THE DANGER OF HYPOCRISY

**[Job 8:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 8.8-14)**

"Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned, for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow. Will they not instruct you and tell you? Will they not bring forth words from their understanding? Can papyrus grow tall where there is no marsh? Can reeds thrive without water? While still growing and uncut, they wither more quickly than grass. Such is the destiny of all who forget God; the hope of the hypocrite shall perish! What he trusts in is fragile; what he relies on is a spider's web!"

Religious controversy is rarely carried on with that meekness and candor, which are necessary to render it profitable to the soul. Even in such a sacred subject as religion, the generality seek for victory rather than for truth, and put such a construction on the expressions of their adversary as to distort his opinions and to calumniate his views.

The friends of Job, though good men, were guilty of this to a very great extent. In the chapter before us, Bildad begins his reply with a most unjustifiable misconstruction of all that Job had spoken; and accuses him of having represented God as "perverting justice;" when Job certainly never intended to make so impious an assertion. But still we must remember, that the general opinions of Bildad were just; and that, if Job had really been such a character as his friends imagined, the warnings which they suggested, and the advice which they gave him, were on the whole both beneficial and good.

In order to enter fully into the meaning of the words before us, we must particularly bear in mind that Bildad regarded the sons of Job as ungodly, and Job himself as hypocritical. Compare [Job 4:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.7-11); [Job 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.3-5) with 8:4, 6. In this view, he designates the former as "forgetting God," and the latter as having acted "the hypocrite" before him; and both the one and the other he compares to "a reed," which, when deprived of water, withers in a very short space of time.

I. We shall consider this comparison in reference to those who manifestly **forget God**.

Here, as we have observed, we must keep in view the precise character which Bildad considered as belonging to the sons of Job.

They were **presently** living in ease and affluence, happy in their family connections, and blessed with an abundant measure of harmony in their domestic circle. The apprehension which their father had, lest his sons should by any means have been led to dishonor God in their mirth, [Job 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.5), shows that they were not, in his opinion at least, possessed of solid piety; while, on the other hand, it showed that they were not decidedly wicked. Now people of this description are very numerous, "There is a generation," says Solomon, "that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness, [Proverbs 30:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.12);" they fill up their stations in life with credit to themselves, and with benefit to all around them; they are irreproachable in their character, as men of honor and integrity, of kindness and benevolence, of decency and decorum; and in all these respects they are, "like the rush in the mire, green and flourishing."

In their **prospects** also and their expectations, they are happy. Not anticipating evil, they look forward to fresh gratifications, like travelers in a rich and fertile country. In early youth they form optimistic hopes of settling in the world; and then of advancing their rising families; and thus, having always some fresh object in view, they run their career of pleasure or ambition, and conclude that, at the termination of it, they shall stand as high in the approbation, of their God, as they do in the estimation of their ignorant fellow-creatures.

In their **end** an especial reference is made to them. Those of the foregoing character, while living in their proper element, the world, flourish; but when, through illness or misfortunes, they can no longer enjoy the world, like the rush in a season of drought, they wither; they need "not be cut down" by great calamities; small trials suffice to rob them of all their verdure, and to reduce them to a very pitiful and drooping state. "In the fullness of their sufficiency they are in straits, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22);" and they are compelled, however reluctantly, to inscribe on every created enjoyment, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

But, if we look to the period of their departure hence, we shall find the text yet more awfully verified in them; then indeed "all their hopes perish, even as a spider's web!" We have a most remarkable illustration of their state in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man seems to have been much such a character as we suppose these to be; he "lived to the flesh rather than to the Spirit," and "to himself rather than unto God." This was the rich man's sin; (we charge him wrongfully, if we accuse him of oppression;) and it is the sin of those we are now speaking of, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5); [Romans 14:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-9) and 2 Corinthians 5:15.

They "forget God." They forget, that God is entitled to all their love, and to all the service which they can possibly render to him; they forget, that, as he is the Author, so he should be also the End, of their being; and that, "whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they should have a single eye to his glory." The end of such a course is seen in the rich man; who was no sooner taken from his present enjoyments, than he was cast into Hell, where he "lift up his eyes in torment, and entreated in vain for a drop of water to cool his tongue." We find him too requesting that a messenger might be "sent to his five surviving brethren, to warn them, lest they also should come into the same place of torment;" for then he found, what during his life he would not believe, what must of necessity be the outcome of such a life; he found, what all must find, (either now by faith, or hereafter by their own actual experience,) that "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)."

II. We shall consider this comparison in reference to those who **make a hypocritical profession of serving God**.

As under the former head we have kept Job's sons in view, so here we must keep Job himself in view.

In Bildad's opinion of Job we find the true notion of a hypocrite.

Job had maintained a high reputation for sanctity, and had shown a great zeal for God's honor in relation to others; but, as Bildad erroneously thought, Job had neglected to consult it himself, or to live agreeably to his avowed principles.

This, though not the true character of Job, is a just description of many among ourselves; they profess to venerate religion, and show much zeal in the propagation of it; they pretend also to feel deeply, when any depart from the good way, and bring a disgrace on their holy profession.

Many professing Christians appear fine to others, but are themselves under the dominion of some besetting sin. They are secretly indulging pride, envy, malice, covetousness, lewdness, or some other bosom lust. They do not live near to God in their secret chamber, or aspire after conformity to His will as revealed in His Word. They are more anxious to appear pious, than to be so; and to be applauded by men, than to be approved by God.

Now these people, while carried on by a conceit of their own superior knowledge of divine truth, and a desire of establishing a character for piety, are, like the reed in the water, green and flourishing; they seem extremely rapid in their growth; and are regarded, both by themselves and others, as people of a higher order of being.

But the hopes of all such people are most delusive.

It rarely happens that a hypocrite continues long to deceive those who are intimately acquainted with his private habits. He cannot maintain a consistency of character, for lack of an inward principle of saving grace. Like the seed sown in ground where it "had no depth of earth," or like the reed destitute of water, he withers away, and exposes both himself and religion to general contempt.

For the truth of this we may appeal to the records of former ages; yes, "though we are of yesterday and know nothing," as it were, we must have seen it but too frequently in our own day; that a person of high expectation has declined from the right path. Hypocrites eventually "make shipwreck either of their faith or of a good conscience." Lot's wife was a monument of a hypocrite in the Old Testament, and Demas was a monument of a hypocrite in the New. Just so, similar monuments of a hypocrite are yet found in every church today!

Let us follow the hypocrite into the eternal world—what is his condition there? Alas! alas! However high he was in his own estimation or in that of others—he is now fallen indeed; and all his towering hopes are now swept away with the broom of destruction! Even while he is here carrying on his deception, though it is unsuspected by himself or others, and though his hypocrisy is not in act, but in heart only—he is "treasuring up wrath for himself" for "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus!"

Possibly he may carry his hope with him into the eternal world, and almost presume to argue with his omniscient Judge. But "He will say to them, I never knew you! Depart from me, you who practice iniquity!" And then their state shall be so superlatively wretched, that those who sink the deepest into perdition are said to "take their portion with the hypocrites!"

"But the wicked will lose hope. They have no escape. Their hope becomes despair." [Job 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.20)

"Where is the hope of the hypocrite, when God takes away his soul?" [Job 27:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.8)

O that we might all learn from this subject:

1. The importance of **genuine piety**.

We are not disposed to undervalue the blessings of worldly prosperity, or domestic happiness; but in comparison with eternal blessedness we must say that everything in this world is only as the dust on the balance. Yet the highest ambition of parents for their children is, to see them precisely in the way that Job's children were, all with separate establishments, living in sweet harmony with each other, and in the vicinity of their parents, where all as one family, may augment and enjoy the happiness of the whole. This state also is regarded by young people of both sexes as the summit of their ambition.

But even in this life we see how soon their gourd may be withered by a worm at the root; and after this life, nothing remains of it, but a fearful responsibility for every hour that has been spent in a forgetfulness of God. Indeed, indeed, however the ungodly may scoff at genuine piety, there is nothing that deserves a thought in comparison with it. If the whole world is no adequate price for one single soul, it is madness to be bartering away our souls, as so many do, for the smallest trifles that can be presented to our view.

To all then, and especially to the young, I would say, Remember God, "remember your Creator in the days of youth" or health; and let "the life which you now live in the flesh, be by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you."

But if you are still disposed to hold fast your delusive expectations, go and sweep away a spider's web, and then reflect, how suddenly, and irrecoverably, it is destroyed! Then say with yourself, Such is my hope, and such will before long be the termination of it. "O consider this, you that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you! [Psalm 50:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.22)."

2. The danger of **self-deception**.

We all see how others deceive themselves; yet none, of whatever class, imagine themselves to be in any great danger of self-delusion. But James tells us, that we may "seem to be religious," and persuade ourselves that we are so, and yet "deceive our own souls, and our religion be worthless! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)." O remember, that we live in a deceitful world, and have an adversary whose wiles and devices are inconceivably subtle; and that our own "hearts also are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked!" Let the consideration of these things make you "jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy."

Do not be too confident that all is right with you; but say with Paul, "Though I know nothing by myself—yet am I not hereby justified; but he who judges me is the Lord, 1 Corinthians 4:4."

Yet, if you have "the testimony of your own conscience that with simplicity and godly sincerity you have your conduct in the world, you may rejoice in it [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12);" only "rejoice with trembling! [Psalm 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.11)." And, bearing in mind that "God requires truth in the inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6)," beg of him to "search and try you, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)," and to make you "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no deceit."

#458

THE FOLLY OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRESUMPTION

**[Job 9:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2-4)**

"How can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?"

The fundamental doctrines of our holy religion are not like the deductions of human reason which leave a degree of doubt upon the mind; they correspond with something within us, which contributes to assure us that the things which we have received upon the divine testimony are unquestionably true. The inspired writers indeed, knowing by whom they were inspired, delivered without hesitation those things of which they had no internal evidence, as well as those which were confirmed by their own experience. Nevertheless there is a peculiar authority in their mode of declaring experimental truths; they make them a subject of appeal to their very enemies, and challenge the whole universe to deny the things whereof they affirm.

Thus it was with Job. Bildad had charged him with asserting his own perfect innocence, and accusing God as unjust in his proceedings towards him, "Does God pervert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice!" Job, in his reply, allowed the premises of his opponent, but denied the consequences which were deduced from them, "I know it is truly so;" that is, I know God will not pervert justice, "but" I deny that I ever intended to justify myself before God, or to harden myself against him; for I am as fully convinced of the folly of acting in such a manner, as you or anyone else can be, "How can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?"

Job asserts two things in his reply:

I. Job strongly asserts **the folly of justifying ourselves before God**.

There are many who justify themselves before God.

Few indeed, if any, will deny that they have sinned; but all unregenerate people will deny that they deserve the wrath of God; at least, if, on account of some flagrant transgression, they are constrained to confess themselves liable to eternal punishment, they hope by some repentance or reformation to compensate for their sins, and to establish a righteousness whereby they may find acceptance with God.

This proceeds from an ignorance of God's standard, the divine law.

"The law of God is perfect, [Psalm 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7);" "the commandment is exceeding broad, [Psalm 119:96](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.96)." It extends not to actions only, but to the thoughts and desires of the heart "You shall not covet." That is, you shall not harbor, you shall not even have an inordinate desire, [Romans 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.7). This requires perfect and perpetual obedience, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). On our failure in any one particular, it denounces a curse against us, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); and from that period it can never justify us. It admits of no repentance on our part, or relaxation on God's part, [Matthew 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.18). It is as immutable as God himself; and it is owing to men's ignorance of this law that they so foolishly build upon it as the foundation of their hopes!

None who understand God's law will ever look for justification from it.

If among a thousand perfect actions, one only were found defective, it were sufficient to condemn us forever. But, if we will try ourselves by the law, we shall not find "one action of a thousand," no, nor one in our whole lives that will not condemn us. If we should presume to "contend with God" respecting the perfection of our best action, how soon would he confound us!

We will venture to expose the folly of such presumption. Bring forth your action to the light; was there nothing amiss in its principle, nothing defective in the manner, nothing of a selfish mixture in its end? See if you can answer a weak sinful creature like yourselves; and, if you cannot, how will you "answer" the pure heart-searching "God!"

See then the folly of hoping ever to "be just with God;" and adopt the language of David, "Enter not into judgment with your servant; for in your sight shall no man living be justified! [Psalm 19:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.12); [Psalm 40:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.12); [Psalm 130:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.3); [Psalm 143:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.2)."

But there is another point in the text to which we must advert, namely,

II. Job strongly asserts **the folly of hardening ourselves against God**.

Those who justify themselves before God are equally prone to harden themselves against him.

This they do by their unbelief and impenitence; they will not give credit to the declarations of God concerning them. They think, in direct opposition to all that God has spoken, that he will never execute his threatenings against the transgressors of his law. They profess to hope that repentance will appease his anger; and yet they put off their repentance from year to year, and take occasion even from his mercy to sin the more against him!

The folly of this appears:

1. From the character of God.

If God were ignorant of what passes in our minds, or unable to punish us for our sins—then we need not concern ourselves so much about him. But are "the thick clouds a covering to him, so that he cannot see us? [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14)." "Are we stronger than he, so that we can provoke him to jealousy, [1 Corinthians 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.22)," without any fear of his resentment? No! "he is wise in heart, and mighty in strength;" he beholds the most secret emotions of our hearts, and will surely call us into judgment for them.

What folly is it then to "harden ourselves against him," when "neither rocks nor mountains can conceal us from him," nor the whole universe combined deliver us from his hands! [Daniel 4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.37). [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21).

2. From the experience of men.

"Who among all the sons of men ever prospered," while he lived in an impenitent and unbelieving state? Many indeed have been wealthy and powerful, [Psalm 73:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3-12); but who ever had solid peace in his conscience? Who ever had real comfort in a dying-hour? Who ever had happiness in the eternal world? This is the only prosperity that deserves our notice; and, in this view of it, the question in the text is unanswerable.

But, if we cannot tell of one who prospered, can we not recount multitudes that have been marked as objects of God's most signal vengeance? Was not the rebellious Pharaoh visited with ten successive plagues, and drowned at last, with all his army, in the Red Sea? [Exodus 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.17); [Exodus 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.17); [Exodus 14:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.28). Was not the vain-glorious Nebuchadnezzar changed, as it were, into a beast for the space of seven years for his impious boasting against God? [Daniel 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.20-21). Was not his son Belshazzar warned by a hand-writing on the wall, in the midst of his lewd, drunken, and blaspheming revels; and, agreeably to the prediction, dethroned and slain that very night? [Daniel 5:22-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.22-28); [Daniel 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.30). But why do we mention individual instances, when we are told, that "every one who, after repeated reproofs, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy! [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1)." Who that considers this denunciation, must not confess that such opposition to a God of infinite wisdom and power is madness itself!

These things then being clear, the following advice cannot but approve itself to the consciences of all.

1. Be attentive to the concerns of your souls.

To "repent, and believe the Gospel," was the command which Jesus himself gave to his hearers; and it is as necessary for you as it was for them. But it may be thought that an attention to spiritual concerns will interfere with your worldly prosperity. This however is not a necessary consequence; there can be no doubt but that, if you serve God faithfully, the world will hate you; but prudence and diligence may advance your temporal interests even in spite of the world's hatred.

Be it so, however; your temporal and spiritual welfare, we will say, are in direct opposition to each other; can it be doubted which you should prefer? Is not the soul of more value then ten thousand worlds? Seek then the prosperity which God approves, and which will continue forever.

2. Study the Gospel in particular.

It is the Gospel alone that can enable you to answer that important question, "How shall a man be just with God?" That takes your eyes off from human attainments, and directs them to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is there "set forth as an atoning sacrifice for sin, that, through him, God may be just, and yet the justifier of penitent and believing sinners, [Romans 3:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.24-26)."

From thence you learn, that Christ's obedience unto death is a sufficient plea against all the accusations of God's law; and that, if you are washed in his blood, God himself will not behold in you the least spot or blemish, [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27). It was from "the Gospel as originally preached to Abraham," that he found out the method of a sinner's acceptance with God, [Galatians 3:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.6-9). All the Apostles acquiesced in this way of salvation; they all renounced their own works in point of dependence, and sought for saving mercy through faith in Christ! [Galatians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.15-16). Let the Gospel then, whether as written by the first ministers of Christ, or as preached by those who now follow their steps, be your meditation and delight; so shall you find support under the most accumulated trials, and be accepted by your God in the day of judgment!

#459

THE EVIL OF A SELF-JUSTIFYING SPIRIT

**[Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21)**

"Though I were righteous, my own mouth would condemn me; Though I were blameless, it would prove me perverse. I am blameless, yet I do not know myself; I despise my life."

In *controversies* of every kind, and more especially in those which relate to religion, the disputants are, for the most part, more anxious to obtain the victory, than to discover truth. Hence, instead of putting that precise construction on each other's words which they were designed to bear—they labor to turn to their own advantage every expression of their adversary, and to derive from it an argument for the support of their own cause. Even good men are by no means so honest as they ought to be in relation to this matter, more especially when they become heated by opposition.

The friends of Job were exceedingly faulty in this particular. They first charged Job with hypocrisy; and then, when he asserted his own innocence in relation to that heinous sin, they represented him as asserting his freedom from all sin, and as justifying himself as a righteous person before God.

This was by no means the intention of Job; on the contrary, he here explicitly declares, that "no man can be just before God, verse 2," and that he would stand utterly self-condemned if he should presume to arrogate to himself any such measure of perfection. He had stated in the foregoing verse, that if he should dare to contend with God, he could neither withstand his power, nor put himself into a capacity to make good his cause before him, verse 19; and now he renounces with abhorrence any such impious idea.

Of the former verse of our text, this is the plain and obvious meaning; and in the latter verse, the same idea seems yet more strongly, though not so plainly, stated, "Though I were blameless," so far as not to be aware of any evil that I had ever committed, "yet would I not know my soul," or pretend to know it as the heart-searching God does, "I would despise my own life," and submit to any death, rather than presume to offer such an insult to the Majesty of Heaven. Thus he avows, in opposition to the charge that had been brought against him,  
first, the folly of a self-justifying spirit,  
and next, the impiety of a self-justifying spirit.

These two we propose to consider in their order:

I. The **folly** of a self-justifying spirit.

By a self-justifying spirit we understand, a persuasion of mind that we do not deserve God's wrath and indignation; but on the contrary, that we do deserve his favor and blessing. Now supposing a person to indulge this spirit, what does he, in fact, affirm? He affirms, if not in words—yet by clear inference, what "his mouth must utterly condemn."

1. The self-justifying man asserts that **there is no truth in the Scriptures**.

The Scriptures in every part either affirm, or take for granted, that man is a sinner, justly condemned, and standing in need of mercy at the hands of an offended God. Now to talk of perfection, or of being righteous before God, is to assert directly the reverse of what the Scriptures assert, and, consequently, to say that there is no truth in them.

But will anyone dare to speak thus concerning the sacred oracles? Will not his own mouth instantly condemn him as a proud and wicked infidel? Or, if he professes to believe the Holy Scriptures, and yet maintain the notion of his being righteous before God, will not his own mouth still condemn him as guilty of the grossest inconsistency? Believer or unbeliever, he must equally stand self-refuted, and self-condemned.

2. The self-justifying man asserts that **there is no sin in his heart**.

We ask not whether there be any flagrant iniquities that can be laid to his charge; it is sufficient if once, in ever so small a degree, in act, word, or thought, he has transgressed, or fallen short of, the perfect law of God; having offended thus far, he has broken the law, and is from that moment subjected to its curse! [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10).

Now to be justified by the very law that condemns us, is a contradiction in terms; so that the person who pretends to be just before God must either deny that he has any sin in his heart, or maintain the contradiction before stated. If it is said, that he may imagine that the law admits of imperfections, and justifies us notwithstanding those imperfections, we answer, that we cannot make laws of our own, but must take the law as we find it; and that the law, being a perfect transcript of God's mind and will, can be satisfied with nothing but perfect and perpetual obedience; and consequently, if ever we have transgressed it in the smallest measure, we are, and must forever be, condemned by it.

To deny the perfection of the law would be to deny the perfection of God, which is atheism. And to admit its perfection, and yet dream of justification by it, is such an absurdity, as every man's own mouth must condemn. The only possible ground of being justified by the law must be, that we have no sin in our hearts; and, if any man dare affirm that, his own mouth has already proved him most ignorant and perverse, [1 John 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.8).

3. The self-justifying man asserts that **he has no need of a Savior**.

If he is righteous himself, he has no need to be clothed in another's righteousness, nor any need of an atonement for his sins; consequently, as far at least as relates to that individual, God has sent his own Son in vain. And will any man say that God, in making his Son "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world," was under a mistake, and that for himself he needed no such exercise of mercy? Why then does such a man call himself a Christian? If he stood in no need of Christ, and is in a state of justification without Christ, he should cease to "name the name of Christ;" for while he continues to do so, his own mouth condemns him, and proves him perverse. "If righteousness comes by the law, then Christ has died in vain! [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.21)."

But let us proceed to notice,

II. The **impiety** of of a self-justifying spirit.

It was not without good reason that Job expressed such an abhorrence of the spirit that was imputed to him; for the indulging of it is,

1. An incrimination of God.

There is not an attribute of God which is not dishonored by a self-justifying spirit:

It impeaches and vilifies God's truth; seeing that he has represented all to be in a state of guilt and condemnation before him.

It denies God's justice; since he threatens all men with damnation, when there are some who do not deserve it.

It degrades God's wisdom; since it supposes that his wonderful plan of providing a surety for us, and laying our sins upon him, was unnecessary.

It holds up to derision also God's mercy and grace, which are proclaimed as incomprehensibly great and glorious, when the very offer of them is only an empty sound!

Hear what God himself says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar! [1 John 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.10)." Can anything be conceived more heinous than this? Should we not "despise our own lives," and submit to ten thousand deaths, rather than be guilty of it?

2. A contempt of our own souls.

God has provided a salvation for us, and offered it freely to all who will accept it in and through his beloved Son; and has told us, that "there is no other name under Heaven whereby we can be saved," but that of Jesus. And yet we choose to ground our claim of happiness on the purity and perfection of our own character, rather than submit to be saved in his appointed way.

But is not this madness? Will a man deal so with his temporal interests? Will he risk the loss of them upon a mere phantom of his own imagination, in direct opposition to the plainest dictates of his understanding? Surely, if men had the least value for their souls, they would not so trifle with them; they would at least endeavor to ascertain what degree of weight was due to their opinions, and whether there was any rational ground for them to expect God's blessing in a way so contrary to his own most express and solemn declarations. But their total indifference about the outcome of their confidence shows that they account their souls of no value, or, as Solomon expresses it, "they despise their own souls! [Proverbs 15:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.32)."

3. A trampling under foot the Son of God.

This is God's own representation of the sin. In rejecting the sacrifice of Christ, there being no other sacrifice—we cut ourselves off from all hope of salvation! Yes, "we trample under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of grace, [Hebrews 10:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-29)." What amazing impiety is this! We are apt to confine our ideas of impiety to gross sins committed against our fellow-creatures. But such sins as unbelief and self-righteousness we suppose to be of very little importance. But God estimates sin chiefly as it dishonors him, and more especially as it militates against that stupendous effort of his love—the redemption of sinners by the blood and righteousness of his beloved Son. Know then, that to justify ourselves, is to repeat, in fact, the conduct of those who crucified the Lord of glory; it is to say, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

This subject may be further improved:

1. For our **conviction**.

Who was it that used the language in our text? It was Job, of whom God himself testified, that "he was a perfect and upright man." And if he could not justify himself before God—then who are we, that we should presume to do so? Are we more perfect than he? Hear how he speaks of himself, a few verses after our text, verses 30, 31; and then see what our views of ourselves should be.

Nor was Job singular in his views of himself; the language of all the most eminent saints, both in the Old and New Testament, is precisely similar, [Psalm 130:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.3). [Psalm 143:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.2). [Proverbs 20:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.9). [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5); [Isaiah 64:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.6). [Philippians 3:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.4-9) and especially 1 Corinthians 4:4. And such must be our views of ourselves also, if ever we would find mercy at the hands of God; we must "humble ourselves, if ever we would be exalted."

2. For our **consolation**.

Some are discouraged at the sight of their own vileness, and are ready to think that such unworthy creatures as they, can never be saved. And such thoughts they might well have, if justification were, either in whole or in part, by any righteousness of our own. But "we are justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [Romans 3:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.24-26)." It is "the ungodly whom God justifies, [Romans 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.5); [Romans 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.6)," not indeed those who continue ungodly, but those who come to Christ in an ungodly state, desiring to be cleansed from the guilt and power of their sins; those people are justified the very moment they believe in Jesus, and from all the sins they have ever committed! [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39). Here indeed is abundant consolation for "the weary and heavy-laden" sinner; here indeed he may find rest to his soul.

Remember then what the Apostle has said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" and that Paul himself, when he was a bloody persecutor and blasphemer, obtained mercy, on purpose that the extent and riches of God's grace might be displayed in him, as a pattern and encouragement to all who should ever desire acceptance with their offended God, [1 Timothy 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15-16).

Follow his example then, and believe in Jesus for the remission of your sins. Say, as the prophet encourages you to do, "In the Lord Jesus have I righteousness and strength;" for "in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and in him shall they glory! [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25)." The very name by which the Lord Jesus himself delights to be called, is, "The Lord our Righteousness! [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)."

#460

IMPATIENCE REPROVED

**[Job 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.1)**

"My soul is weary of my life and loathe it! . . . I will speak out in the bitterness of my soul."

Life is justly esteemed a blessing; and we are properly taught in the Liturgy to thank God, as well for our creation, as for our preservation, and redemption.

But to the greater part of mankind this world is a chequered scene at best; and to very many it is only a valley of tears. Had we seen Job in his prosperity, we would have been led perhaps to form a more favorable estimate of the present state; but there are changes in the affairs of men, as much as in the air and seas. The day that dawned with the most promising appearance, may be overcast with clouds, and blackened with tempests, before the sun has reached its meridian height! Thus it was with Job; the man that was the envy of all who knew him, was in a short space of time so reduced, as to exclaim, "My soul is weary of my life."

I. We shall show that this is a common experience of men.

"My soul is weary of my life." Daily observation proves that it is common,

1. Among the **ungodly**.

It arises from domestic trials. Who can tell what trouble:  
a tyrannical or unfaithful husband,  
a contentious or imprudent wife,  
a rebellious or extravagant son,  
an indiscreet or unchaste daughter,  
may occasion?

There is scarcely a family to be found where something does not happen to embitter life, and to make death an object of desire!

From personal troubles also the same disquietude will spring. Pain and sickness, when of long continuance, and especially when accompanied with the infirmities of old age—cause many to wish for a speedy dissolution.

Poverty too, will so oppress the spirits, particularly when occasioned by one's own extravagance or folly, as to make the soul weary of life. Yes, to such a degree are the minds of men oppressed by troubles of this kind, that a deliverance from them is frequently sought in suicide!

Even a mere sense of the emptiness of all earthly things will often fill the soul with disgust, and cause it to sigh for a release from the body, in which it finds no satisfactory enjoyment.

Many, in the midst of youth, health, and affluence, while moving in a constant round of amusements, and free from every external trouble—are yet so weary of life, that they would gladly part with it immediately, if they were not afraid of entering into the infernal world!

But, above all, a guilty conscience renders man "a burden to himself." A person "weary and heavy-laden" with a sense of sin, and not knowing where to go for rest, is indeed a pitiable object. He wishes that he had never been born, or that he could be again reduced to a state of non-existence. If he might but be annihilated like the beasts, he would gladly accept the offer, and most thankfully forego all hope of Heaven, to obtain deliverance from the fears of Hell!

2. Among the **godly**.

Not even the most eminent saints are altogether free from this experience. They are not, while in the flesh, above the reach of temporal afflictions. They are not indeed overcome by every little trouble, like those who know not God. Yet they are not insensible to pain or pleasure; they have their feelings, as well as other men. Pains of body, loss of substance, bereavements of friends, injuries from enemies—may, when accumulated, cast them down; and produce, as in the case of Job, extreme dejection.

The weight of spiritual troubles is felt by these exclusively; nor can those who have never experienced their pressure, form any just conception respecting them. Who can describe the anguish that is occasioned by violent temptations, powerful corruptions, unsuccessful conflicts? What language can paint the distress of a soul under the hidings of God's face, and the apprehensions of his wrath? Can we wonder that a person long exercised with such trials, should say, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away, and be at rest! [Psalm 55:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.4-6)." Surely "the spirit of a man may sustain other infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear? [Proverbs 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.14)."

The commonness of this experience may well lead us to,

II. We shall inquire into the reasons of it.

"My soul is weary of my life."

Many reasons may be assigned, but we shall limit ourselves to a few:

1. Impatience.

Job, whose patience is celebrated even by God himself, when borne down by the weight of his afflictions, cursed the day of his birth! [Job 3:1-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 3.1-22), and longed exceedingly for death! [Job 6:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.8-9); and would have been glad to have had a end put to his existence, even by strangling, rather than to have it protracted any longer in such misery! [Job 7:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.15-16).

To the same source we must trace those hasty wishes, which we also are ready to form in seasons of great calamity. If "patience had its perfect work in us," we should be willing to bear whatever God might see fit to lay upon us. But "in the day of adversity, the strongest of us are too apt to faint."

2. Unbelief.

From this more particularly arose that weariness and aversion to life which the Prophet Elijah manifested, when he fled from Jezebel. He had encountered Ahab, and slain all the prophets of Baal, in dependence on the divine protection; but when this wicked woman threatened him, he did not take counsel from the Lord, but instantly fled into the wilderness; and, to get rid of all his dangers and difficulties at once, requested God to kill him! [1 Kings 19:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.4).

Had he felt the same security in God us on former occasions, he would have been quite composed, knowing assuredly that without God's permission not a hair of his head could fall to the ground.

Thus when afflictions render us weary of life, we show that we have forgotten the promise of Jehovah to make all things work together for our good. When we know that medicine is operating for our good, we disregard the uneasiness that it occasions; we are contented even to pay for the prescriptions, from a confidence that we shall be benefitted by them in the outcome.

Just so, should we not welcome the prescriptions of our heavenly Physician, if we duly considered his unerring wisdom, goodness, and truth? Instead of repining and murmuring on account of God's afflictive dispensations, we should rest satisfied that our heavenly Father knows best!

3. A forgetfulness of our real desert.

Man, as a sinner, deserves the curse of the law, and the wrath of God. Suppose we bore this in mind—would we not say, even under the most accumulated trials, "You have punished us less than our iniquities deserve! [Ezra 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.13)." Would not a recollection of our desert of death and Hell constrain us to cry, "Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39)."

Would Jonah have been so clamorous for death, and so ready to justify his impatience before God, [Jonah 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 4.2-3); [Jonah 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 4.8-9), if he had considered what he merited at God's hands?

Just so, neither should we be so fretful under our sufferings, if only we bore in mind that instead of being put into the furnace of affliction, we should, if dealt with according to our deserts, be cast into the flames of Hell! We should learn rather to adopt the sentiment of the Church of old, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him! [Micah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.9)."

4. A disregard of the great ends of life.

It is truly humiliating to find not only such querulous, and almost doubtful, characters as Jonah, but the bold Elijah, the pious David, the patient Job—fainting in their trials, and longing for their death. But to this catalogue we must add another, even Moses, the meekest of mankind. Even this holy man, unable to bear up under the burdens imposed upon him, complains of them to God, and says, "If you deal thus with me, I beg you to kill me! [Numbers 11:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.14-15)." Would he have offered such a petition if he had reflected on the benefits which had already accrued to Israel by his means, and, humanly speaking, the incalculable loss which they would sustain by his removal?

Just so, should not we also be more willing to endure our trials, if we considered what valuable ends might be promoted by our continuance under them? Perhaps we are not prepared to die; for people are most apt to wish for death when they are least prepared to meet it! For the sake of extricating themselves from some heavy earthly afflictions—many commit suicide and thus plunge themselves, both body and soul, into the everlasting miseries of Hell!

But, supposing that we are prepared, may not others be greatly edified by our example, our counsels, and our prayers? May not our own weight of glory also be greatly increased, by a due improvement of our light and momentary afflictions? [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17). Is not this last consideration alone sufficient to reconcile us to a prolonging of our troubles, and a deferring of our heavenly felicity? For this sublime idea the author is in a measure indebted to a poor woman (so poor as to be supported by the parish), who, when in great pain, and almost in dying circumstances, replied (in answer to what he had suggested respecting the rest and happiness that awaited her), "True, Sir, but in some respects affliction is better even than Heaven itself; for, etc. etc."

We may indeed be in a strait between the two; but we shall, like Paul, be willing to live, when we reflect how much better that may be both for ourselves and others, [Philippians 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23-24).

Towards lessening this common evil, we shall,

III. Prescribe some **remedies** for it.

The painful experience before described may be mitigated, and in many cases wholly prevented, by,

1. A due attention to our worldly callings.

People under the pressure of heavy afflictions are apt to give themselves up to sorrow, and to neglect the proper duties of their calling. By this means their minds become more and more enervated; their spirits sink, and they fall a prey to their sorrows; and die of a broken heart. But if, instead of thus yielding to lowness of spirits, they would employ themselves in their accustomed duties, their occupations would divert their attention from their troubles, and give scope and opportunity to the mind to recover its proper tone. Whether the troubles be of a temporal or spiritual nature, this remedy should be applied. We must not indeed go and plunge ourselves into business or amusement in order to get rid of reflection, (that would be to run into a contrary extreme;) but we should never be so occupied with our sufferings as to forget or neglect our duties. It is remarkable, that when God repeated to the fugitive prophet that expostulatory question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" he ordered him, not to sit any longer wishing for death, but to go about the business which yet remained for him to do; namely, to return to Damascus, and anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, and Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be his successor in the prophetic office, [1 Kings 19:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.15-16). And in the same manner, it befits us not to sit wishing for the spoils of victory, but to continue fighting until God shall call us to put off our armor!

2. A close walk with God.

It is strange that heavy trials which are sent to bring us to God, often prevail rather to drive us from him! We complain, "We are so overwhelmed with trouble, that we cannot think of our souls or compose our minds for supplication to God." But we are particularly commanded to "call on God in the time of trouble, [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.15);" and to "cast all our care upon Him, who cares for us, [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7)." We see in the instance of Paul how speedily our sorrows might be turned into joy, if only we would use this remedy, [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-10).

Surely one ray of the light of his countenance would dissipate all our darkness, and change our impatient murmurings into "thanksgiving and the voice of melody." If we were bowed down with a sense of guilt—then one glimpse of Christ would remove the load from our conscience. If we were harassed with the fiercest temptations or most overwhelming fears—then one word from him would quiet the tempestuous ocean, and qualify us for encountering all the storms with which we might at any time be overtaken.

3. A frequent survey of Heaven.

A view of Heaven would indeed excite desires after the full enjoyment of it. But this is very different from the experience which is described in the text. Our longings after Heaven cannot be too ardent, provided we are contented to wait God's time in order to possess it! [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12). This is an important distinction, and most accurately marked by the Apostle Paul. He knew that Heaven was the portion prepared for him; and he earnestly desired to enjoy it, 2 Corinthians 5:1-3; but these desires did not spring from an impatient wish to get rid of his troubles, or to terminate his conflicts—but from a thirst after God himself, and the perfect fruition of his glory! [2 Corinthians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.4).

Now this would be a most effectual remedy against the other. The brighter the views we had of the glory that awaits us—the less we would regard the sufferings of this present time!

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!" [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)."

If the years of labor and servitude appeared to Jacob only as a few days, because of the love he bore to Rachel, and the desire he had to possess her as his wife, [Genesis 29:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 29.20), so will the tribulations which are appointed as our way to the kingdom, [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22), appear of little concern, when we look to the end of our journey, and the felicity we shall then enjoy!

#461

CONSCIOUS INTEGRITY

**[Job 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.7)**

"You know that I am not wicked."

As painful as the consideration of *God's omniscience* must be to the wicked, it is a rich source of consolation to those who are upright before him. Circumstances may arise, wherein they may not be able fully to vindicate their character to the world, even though they are perfectly innocent of the things laid to their charge. The defilement also which they sometimes contract by reason of their indwelling corruptions maybe such as to excite fears respecting the state of their souls; while they are maintaining a strenuous conflict with the whole body of sin. In such cases it will be a satisfaction to them to reflect, that their very inmost souls are naked and open before God; and that he can discern the integrity of their hearts, even when most clouded, either by unreasonable suspicions, or just occasions of doubt.

From God's omniscience Job drew his consolation, when the dispensations of Providence seemed to justify his friends in accusing him of hypocrisy; he could then appeal to God, and say, "You know that I am not wicked."

We propose to show,

I. What we are to understand by Job's appeal.

Job never intended to assert that he was possessed of sinless perfection.

God had indeed honored him with the title of a "perfect man." But in the very same place, the import of the term "perfect" is limited and explained by the word "upright" united to it, [Job 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.8). *Perfection*, in the Scripture use of the word, relates rather to our desires than our attainments; and denotes that growth in grace, which is found in those who have arrived at the full stature of a Christian, as distinguished from a state of infantile weakness, or youthful inexperience.

That Job did not deny himself to be a sinner, or still to be encompassed with sinful infirmities, is evident from the whole of the preceding context, where he repeatedly acknowledges, and deeply bewails, his own depravity, [Job 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.20); [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21); [Job 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-31). Indeed his spirit at this time was by no means free from sinful impatience, verse 3; so that, if he had boasted of sinless perfection, he would have opposed the whole tenor of Scripture, [1 Kings 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.46). [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2). [1 John 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.8), and his own mouth would have condemned him, and proved him perverse.

1. He appealed to God that he was free from the sin imputed to him by his friends.

Job's friends imagined that heavy judgments were never sent except as punishments of some enormous wickedness. What evils Job had been guilty of, they could not tell; but, as they saw him so grievously afflicted, they concluded that he must have indulged some secret wickedness, which God now intended to disclose and punish. They therefore, at a venture, accused him of hypocrisy, [Job 8:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 8.13-14); [Job 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 8.20). But he repelled the charge, and asserted, in opposition to them, his own innocence. David did the same in [Psalm 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.3); [Psalm 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.8); [Psalm 26:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.1); [Psalm 26:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.6). Just so did Paul in [1 Thessalonians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.10).

2. He appealed to God that he was on the whole, upright before Him.

He had sincerely endeavored to serve and please God; nor did his conscience accuse him of allowedly indulging in sin. In hopes therefore that the solemnity of an appeal to God would convince and satisfy his friends, he presumed to address God in the words of our text. Nor was this without an evident propriety; for, as the troubles which proceeded from God were considered as a testimony against him, he could not clear himself better than by appealing to the Author of those troubles for a testimony in his favor. To have done this merely to cover his guilt, would have been madness; for if he was already suffering the rebukes of God on account of his hypocrisy, he could expect nothing but a ten-fold load of misery us the reward of such aggravated impiety. Such an appeal therefore to the heart-searching God, upon a subject of which none but God could judge, was the best, and indeed the only means, of re-establishing his character in the good opinion of his friends.

But, that we may not be too hasty in making such an appeal, let us consider,

II. What is necessary to warrant Job's appeal.

1. We ought to have the testimony of our own conscience that we are free from the **practice**of all **allowed**sin.

If we allow ourselves in the practice of any sin:

Then we are servants of sin, [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16).

Then we belong to Satan, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8).

Then we have no saving interest in the covenant or grace, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14).

Then even the prayers we offer in such a state are an abomination to the Lord! [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18). [Proverbs 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.9).

It matters not whether the sin be open or secret, great or small; if we indulge it willingly, we oppose the authority of God, which is equally displayed in every commandment. It is no excuse to say, that such or such an indulgence is conducive to our comfort, or necessary to our welfare. If it is as useful as a right hand, or as precious as a right eye, we can never be sincere, if we do not pluck it out, and cast it from us! [Matthew 5:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.29-30). In order to say with truth, "I am not wicked," we must have "a single eye, [Matthew 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22)," and be Israelites indeed, without deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47).

2. We ought to have the testimony of our own conscience that we endeavor habitually to approve ourselves to **God**.

We may approve ourselves to our fellow-creatures, while there is much iniquity harbored in our hearts! If we would have a good conscience, we must act, not before men to be approved by them, but before God to be approved by him.

God's will must be the authority for our obedience.

God's Word must be the rule of our obedience.

God's glory must be the end of our obedience.

[1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31); [Colossians 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.23).

We must have as much respect to the motives of our obedience, as to our words and actions. We must be careful to purge out all leaven, [Luke 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.1). [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7-8), and to have the very thoughts of our hearts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5).

Without this we cannot say, "I am not wicked;" for that which is the root and summit of all wickedness abides within us. We have "a carnal mind that is enmity against God, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7);" and however clean we may be in the outward appearance, we are inwardly like white-washed sepulchers, full of rottenness and all impurity! [Matthew 23:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.27-28).

But in proportion to the difficulty of making this appeal is,

III. The **blessedness**of being able to make Job's appeal.

Certainly such a consciousness of our own integrity must be a rich consolation to us,

1. Under any troubles that may come upon us.

Under the pressure of any heavy calamity, when God seems as if he were "bringing our sins to remembrance," and especially in times of persecution, when our characters are traduced, and we are regarded as the most worthless of mankind; we find it a most painful addition to our grief if we think that we have brought the trial on ourselves by some misconduct of our own. But if, in either of these cases, we can appeal to God that we have sought only his glory, and endeavored to approve ourselves to him, we shall feel our trials greatly alleviated, and our spirits calmed. Never was a man more cruelly aspersed, or more virulently persecuted, than the Apostle Paul; yet the reflection that God knew his heart, and approved his conduct, made it appear "a light matter to him to be judged by man's judgment, [1 Corinthians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3)." A similar consciousness will be productive of similar composure in all our minds, 2 Corinthians 1:12.

2. In the prospect of death and judgment.

None who have guilt upon their conscience can look forward to these seasons without pain and dread. But to him who can make this appeal to God, death and judgment have lost all their terrors. He has within himself a pledge of the felicity that awaits him. The judgment has already passed, as it were, with respect to him; and, while others have only a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume them—he "knows that he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1)." Not being condemned in his own heart, he has a just and Scriptural confidence towards God, [1 John 3:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.19-21).

Address,

1. To those who are living in any known sin.

Perhaps you have contrived so well, that you can defy man to lay any particular evil to your charge. But what will that avail, while God beholds the secret abominations of your hearts! To what purpose is it to say to your fellow-creatures, "You cannot accuse me," when you are constrained to confess before God, "You know that I am wicked!" Reflect on the strictness of the trial that awaits you; and know, that God will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil! [1 Corinthians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.4-5).

2. To those who think themselves in a good state before God.

It is by no means uncommon for men to "deceive themselves, by thinking themselves to be something, when they are nothing, [Galatians 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3)." The way to prevent this is to take the Word of God as the standard by which we try ourselves; and, to beg of God to search and try us. This is recommended by Paul, in order that we may have rejoicing in ourselves alone, and not merely in the good opinion of others, [Galatians 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.4-5). If indeed we have in ourselves an evidence that we truly love and fear God, we may say, with Peter, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you! [John 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.17)." But, after all, we should remember that whatever our estimate is of our own character, "Not he who commends himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commends! 2 Corinthians 10:18."

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THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

**[Job 11:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.7-9)**

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea."

We are grieved to see a godly man, under circumstances that should have called forth nothing but tenderness and compassion, run down and persecuted by his own friends, and those friends men of great intelligence and real piety. But human nature, notwithstanding it may have been renovated by divine grace, is still imperfect; and, if left under the influence of any mistaken principle, we may pursue evil with earnestness under the semblance of good, and may provoke God to anger, while we imagine that we are rendering him the most acceptable service.

The friends of Job were eminently enlightened men; yet all in succession act towards him the part of enemies; and each in succession, with increasing acrimony, condemns him as a hypocrite before God. How painful is it to hear this address of Zophar, "Will your idle talk reduce men to silence? Will no one rebuke you when you mock? verse 3."

But, while we lament the sad misapplication of their arguments to the point in hand, and the bitterness of spirit with which they were urged, we must still avail ourselves of the instruction they afford us, which in some respects is equal to any that is contained in the sacred volume.

Zophar supposed that Job had complained of God as acting unjustly towards him; and, if he had been right in his interpretation of Job's expressions, the reproof he administered would have been just and beneficial. His error in relation to Job's real character divests his observations of all force in reference to him; but they deserve the strictest attention in reference to ourselves. From them we are naturally led to notice:

I. The incomprehensibility of God.

Well does David say, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable! [Psalm 145:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.3)."

1. God is unsearchable in his **attributes**.

Men will often talk of God, and lay down laws for him, just as if they had the most perfect knowledge of him, and of everything relating to him. But our knowledge of God is altogether negative: we know that he is not unwise, not unholy, not unjust. But we have no definite understanding of his attributes. What notion have we of his natural attributes of eternality or immensity? None at all. So of his moral perfections, of justice, mercy, goodness, truth—we, in fact, know as little. We contemplate these qualities as existing in man, and are enabled to estimate with some precision their proper bearings; but, when we come to transfer these qualities to God, we are much in the dark. We are guilty of great presumption when we prescribe rules for him, and bind him by laws that are suited for the restrictions or human actions. "He dwells in the light which no man can approach unto;" and presumptuously to ascend the mount of his habitation, or to look within the ark, is death, [Exodus 19:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.12-13). [1 Samuel 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.19).

2. God is unsearchable in the dispensations of his **providence**.

These we see; but no one of them do we understand. This was as strongly affirmed by Job himself as by his friends. Compare [Job 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.9); [Job 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.10) with the text.

Who will pretend to account for God's conduct towards our first parents, in allowing them to be overcome by temptation, and to entail sin and misery on all their posterity?

Who will undertake to declare all the consequences that may arise from anyone event, however trivial, or all the motives which exist in the divine mind for the permission of it?

We are apt to speak of things as great and small, because of the degree of importance that we attach to them; but there is nothing great, nothing small, in the estimation of God. Whoever meditates on the history of Joseph, or the facts recorded in the Book of Esther, will see that the most casual and trifling circumstances, as they appear to us, were as important links in the chain of providence, as those which bear the clearer marks of counsel and design

The rejection of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, and the restoration of the Jews to the favor of their God, are events of vast magnitude in human estimation; but what the Apostle says in reference to them, is in reality as applicable to the events of daily occurrence, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. [Romans 11:33-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33-36)."

3. God is unsearchable in the operations of his **grace**.

Let that first act of grace be surveyed—the destination of God's only dear Son to be the surety and substitute of sinful man;  
let the whole covenant of grace be contemplated;  
let every act of grace from the foundation of the world to this present moment be scrutinized  
—what do we know of any of this?

Let it be inquired, why God puts a difference between one nation and another, and between one individual and another;

let the mode in which divine grace operates upon the soul be investigated, so as to distinguish in all things the agency of the Holy Spirit from the actings of our own minds;

who is sufficient for these things?

Who is not a child and a fool in his own estimation, when he turns his attention to them? We would address our text to every man, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea! [Job 11:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.7-9)." "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out! [Job 37:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 37.23)." "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God! 1 Corinthians 2:11."

II. If God be so incomprehensible, then we may see the folly of presuming to sit in judgment upon Him.

This was the particular drift of Zophar's admonition. He conceived that Job had complained of God as unjust towards him; and therefore, having solemnly warned Job, that "God had exacted less of him than his iniquities deserved," he proceeded to elaborate upon the character and ways of God as far exceeding all human comprehension, and to show unto Job the folly of arraigning the conduct of the Most High God. In prosecution of his argument, Zophar shows:

1. How impotent we are to resist his will.

God is almighty; and, if he is pleased "to cut off" a man's family, "or to shut him up" in darkness and distress, "or to gather together" his adversaries against him, then "what power has any man to hinder him?" We may dispute against him; but we cannot divert him from his purpose. We may complain and murmur; but "we cannot stay his hand." "He does according to his will in the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth;" and, "whatever his counsel may be—that shall stand!"

What folly then is it to be indulging hard thoughts of him, and to be maintaining a stoutness of heart against him, when we know beforehand that we can never prevail, that we only kick against the goads, and that the only way of averting his wrath is to humble ourselves before him! Think, all you who now repine, "Will your hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with you! or will you thunder with a voice like his!"

2. How impotent we are to escape his judgment.

God sees all the rebellious motions of our hearts, and will certainly call us into judgment for them! Here then, is a strong additional reason for not presuming to condemn him. To know that the indulgence of such a rebellious spirit will not avert his displeasure, is quite sufficient to suppress all risings of heart against him. But to know that it greatly increases his displeasure; to know that he marks every rebellious thought that springs up in our minds, and "that he considers it" with a view to a just and awful retribution—surely this should make us extremely cautious how we thus ensure and aggravate our eternal condemnation! On this subject we shall do well to remember the warning which God himself gave to Job, "He who reproves God, let him answer it! [Job 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2)."

3. How destitute we are of anything that can qualify us to presume to sit in judgment upon God.

What is "vain man, that would be wise?" What? "He is born" as stupid, as unteachable, and as refractory "as a wild donkey's colt! [Jeremiah 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.23-24)." Were he of the first order of created intelligences, he could know nothing of God any further than God was pleased to reveal himself to him. But he is a being of an inferior order, and that too in a fallen and degraded state, "having the eyes of his understanding darkened" by sin, and "blinded by the god of this world;" yes more, having also a thick impenetrable "veil over his heart."

What then can such a creature pretend to know of God, that he should presume to sit in judgment upon him, and to arraign his conduct?

We know how incompetent a little child would be to comprehend and sit in judgment upon the designs of a great statesman; yet is there no distance between those, in comparison with the distance which exists between God and us. Let us bear in mind then what we ourselves are; and that will most effectually repress our arrogance, if we are tempted to judge God.

As the obvious improvement of this subject, let us learn,

1. To receive with meekness whatever God has revealed in His Word.

We are no more to sit in judgment upon God's Word, than upon his providence or grace.

If once is be ascertained that the Scripture is a revelation from God—then we are to receive it with the simplicity of a little child. We must indeed use all possible means to attain a clear knowledge of the meaning of Scripture, as well as to assure ourselves that it is of divine origin. But we must never twist the word, and put an unnatural construction upon it—simply because we do not fully comprehend it. We must rather look up to God for the teachings of his Spirit, and wait upon him until he shall be pleased to "open our minds to understand the Scriptures."

Did we act thus, setting ourselves against no truth that God has revealed, but receiving with humility whatever he has spoken, then we would no longer behold the Church torn into parties, and the minds of men embittered against each other by controversies. Let us remember:  
that "the riches of Christ are unsearchable!"  
that "his love surpasses knowledge;"  
and that however deep our knowledge of Scripture may be, there will always remain many things difficult to be understood;  
that our wisdom is, first, to improve for our benefit all that is clear;  
and then, in reference to the rest, to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."

2. To bear God's afflictions with patience.

Our impatience does, in fact, reflect upon God either as unjust or unkind. But if we considered how "little a portion is heard of him," that "his footsteps are not known," and that those things which we deplore as calamities are sent by him in love for our eternal good—then we would not only submit with patience to whatever he might lay upon us, but would adore him for it as an expression of his love.

The outcome of Job's trials is proposed to us in this very view, as the means of composing our minds, and of reconciling us to the most afflictive providences, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11). If Job were now to live on earth again, and were to see all the benefit that has resulted both to himself and to the Church, and all the glory that has redounded to his God from the troubles that he endured—then how differently would he speak of them, from what he did when under their immediate pressure! What he has seen of God's unerring wisdom and unbounded love, would make him justify God, yes and glorify him too, for all those trials which once he felt so insupportable.

Just so, if we now by faith learn to estimate the divine character aright, we shall welcome every dispensation however afflictive, and glory in our present troubles, under the sweet assurance that "our light shall before long rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noon-day."

#463

LACK OF SYMPATHY CONDEMNED

**[Job 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 12.5)**

"He who is ready to slip with his feet is as a despised lamp, in the thought of him who is at ease."

The friends of Job meant well; but utterly mistaking his case, all that they spoke, though good in itself, was irrelevant, and tended only to aggravate his sorrows, which it was their professed intention to alleviate. The injustice of their remarks generated in him somewhat of resentment; though, considering how cruel and unjust their reflections were, we wonder not that his vindications of himself should assume somewhat of that character. But, passing by his barbed reprehension of them in verse 2, I would call your attention to the complaint which he utters in the words which I have just read. It was a just complaint, as it respected them; and it contains a truth, which is confirmed by universal experience.

To mark the precise import of Job's expressions, I will set before you:

I. The evil complained of.

Job did not intend to deny that his friends were possessed of humanity, or to say that kind dispositions might not be found even in ungodly men; for, where distress is great and visible, and within the reach of common remedies, there are many who will find a pleasure in relieving it. It was not this which Job designed to controvert. To enter into the full meaning of his Words, we must distinctly notice,

1. The terms in which the evil is expressed.

The afflicted person is described as "He who is ready to slip with his feet." Now, this is not the case with people in common afflictions. It refers to those only whose afflictions are of a peculiarly dark, complicated nature, contrary to the common course of things, or, at all events, contrary to what, according to the usual dispensations of Providence, might have been expected.

These trials lead a person to complain of God himself, and to question the justice and goodness of his dealings with them. Such was the state of Asaph, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, and compared it with the afflicted lot of God's own faithful servants. He said, "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Then he adds, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence, [Psalm 73:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.2-3); [Psalm 73:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.13)." Here, by reason of his trouble, this godly man was ready to think that it was altogether in vain to serve the Lord.

Now, such a person meets with little compassion from those who have never experienced any similar affliction, "he is as a despised lamp, in the thought of him that is at ease." That is, the man who is at ease in his circumstances and in his mind, cannot enter into the feelings of one who is thus dejected. He therefore looks upon the sufferer just as a man, after the sun is risen, looks upon a lamp in the street, from which he can reap no benefit, and about which he feels no concern. He will not get a ladder, in order to trim it; nor will he put himself to the expense of oil to supply it; nor does he care how soon it is extinguished. Like the priest and Levite in the parable, he passes by such a sufferer with unconcern, instead of getting oil and wine to pour into, and to mollify, the wounds of the sufferer.

This leads us to a just view of,

2. The evil itself.

Job was in such circumstances as his friends could not at all account for; yes, and he himself too was ready to complain of God, as acting unjustly and unmercifully towards him. Hence his friends, who came with a good design to comfort him, expressed in reality no compassion towards him, nor seemed to feel any concern, even though, by their unkind insinuations, they should drive him to despair. They did, indeed, give him good advice, on a supposition he was a hypocrite chastised of God for some secret and enormous wickedness; but, for a saint placed in the furnace, by a wise and merciful Refiner for his own good, and the good of all to whom his history should in future ages be made known, there was not, in all their advice, one word of comfort, or encouragement, or support.

They themselves, never having been involved in such trouble, could not understand his case. When Job shined as the sun in his prosperity, they could avail themselves of his light, and bask with pleasure in his beams; but, now that he was under so thick a cloud, they regarded him only "as a despised lamp," which, having been shorn of its luster, was left to be extinguished in utter darkness.

And such is the treatment generally given to people who are circumstanced as Job was. Their sorrows being so little understood, they find but little sympathy. Even godly people know not how to meet their case, or what to say for their relief. The blow, which has struck down the sufferer, has stunned and stupefied those who, under less complicated afflictions, might have been able to comfort him; and hence he is, for the most part, left without those compassionate attentions which his sorrows require, and perhaps is regarded as one whose troubles admit not of any consolation, and of whose restoration to happiness there is no hope.

This evil prevailing so generally, I will endeavor to show,

II. The state of mind which it manifests.

Certainly it denotes,

1. A lack of Christian **knowledge**.

By Christian knowledge, I mean the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and of all the wonders of His redeeming love. Doubtless, a man may have a speculative knowledge of the Gospel, and yet be a stranger to the tender feelings of sympathy in such a case as this; (for even the devils possess a speculative knowledge of the Gospel, to a great extent,) but a practical and influential knowledge he possesses not.

How can he ever have duly contemplated the compassions of Almighty God towards our fallen race? Can he have ever been astonished with the Father's love towards us rebellious creatures, and yet feel no pity towards a suffering brother? What sense can he have of the tender mercies of our Lord, when he undertook to assume our fallen nature on purpose that he might "bear in his own sacred person our sins, and, by bearing, take away our iniquities from us forever, [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4)."

What, I say, can he know of the length and breadth and depth and height of this immeasurable love, and remain insensible to the needs and miseries of others?

I may further add, What can he know of "the love of the Holy Spirit" towards us, in undertaking for us the office of "a Comforter," and dwelling in our polluted bosoms, as in a temple, for the express purpose of administering consolation to us, and of perfecting in us the work which the Father planned, and the Son executed, and which He, the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, applies?

When all this love has been shown to us on purpose to generate in us a similar love towards each other, [John 15:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.12-13). [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)—what can he who has no sympathy for others, know of this stupendous mystery? If it is true respecting those who sympathize not with others in their bodily necessities, that "they have not the love of God in them, [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17)," then much more is it true, that those who have no compassion for a brother under the pressure of spiritual troubles, can possess but little knowledge of that mystery which unites all in one body, and causes every member to participate in the feelings and necessities of the whole body? [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.25-26).

2. A lack of Christian **experience**.

Some find comparatively few conflicts in the divine life. Others have to maintain a severe warfare, by which they are often reduced to great straits. Now, it is to these latter that I refer, when I speak of Christian experience.

It is by no means uncommon for people, at their first awakening, to be bowed down with fear and terrible apprehensions of the divine displeasure. It was thus with the first converts on the day of Pentecost, "they were pricked to the heart; and cried out in great agony of soul: Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

In subsequent stages of the divine life, too, many are brought into deep waters, where, like David, they are apprehensive of being swallowed up, and utterly destroyed! [Psalm 69:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.2). They "pass through fire and through the water, [Isaiah 43:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2);" and if they were not succored from on high by more than ordinary communications of grace, they would sink and perish.

Now, these people can enter into the feelings of others who are cast down by reason of their afflictions; and can suggest to them many suitable reflections, such as perhaps the angels suggested to our Lord, when tempted in the wilderness, [Matthew 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.11), and when agonizing in the garden of Gethsemane, [Luke 22:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.43).

But the man who has no sympathy with people under such circumstances, shows, that he knows but little either of temptations or deliverances; since these deep experiences are given to some for the express purpose that they may thereby be both qualified and disposed to administer to others the consolations with which they themselves "are comforted by God, [2 Corinthians 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.4-6)."

3. A lack of Christian **sympathy**.

The very essence of Christianity is love; and it is "by bearing one another's burdens that we very principally fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)." But how can we fulfill that law, if we do not "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep? [Romans 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.15)." Or how can we possess "true and undefiled religion, if we do not visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction? [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27)," and endeavor, according to our ability, to "lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and to make straight and smooth paths? [Hebrews 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.12-13)," for "the feet of those who are ready to slip?"

It was peculiarly characteristic of our blessed Lord, that "he would not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, until he should bring forth judgment unto victory, [Isaiah 42:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.3)." If we do not resemble him in his compassionate regard for his afflicted saints, whatever we may profess, "we have not the mind that was in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)."

Behold, then,

1. The benefits of affliction.

"Affliction, doubtless, is not joyous, but grievous;" but it qualifies us for services for which we would be otherwise unfit. Our blessed Lord was tempted in all things like unto us, sin only excepted, on purpose that he might be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and be qualified (so to speak) "to support those who are tempted, [Hebrews 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17-18);" and from that very consideration we are encouraged to come to him for relief under our troubles, [Hebrews 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15-16). Shall we not, then, be content to learn in the school of adversity, the lessons which he designs us to convey to others?

We trust that Job, if he were on earth again, and knew how many millions of souls his example has instructed, would readily submit again to the same discipline, in order to communicate the same blessings to mankind. And we also may well descend with David into the horrible pit and miry clay of despondency itself, if only, with him, we may have "a new song put into our mouth, which many, beholding, may fear, and put their trust in the Lord. [Psalm 40:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.2-3)."

2. The excellency of the Gospel.

Under the gospel dispensation we have a perfect antidote to all the afflictions, even such as Job afflictions. We have a far greater insight into the nature of God's dispensations, than they had under the darker ministration of the Law. The compassions of Christ do, in fact, dispel every cloud; and bring such light into the soul, that it may be said of all who view them aright, "Unto the godly there arises up light in the darkness, [Psalm 112:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.4);" and every believing soul may say, "When I walk in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me! [Micah 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.8)."

Yes, brethren, "there is balm in Gilead"—there is balm for every wound. Only study the Gospel, and get your souls filled with a sense of redeeming love, and every storm you encounter shall only forward you to your desired haven, and every furnace you endure shall only purge you from your dross, and "fit you, as vessels of honor, for the use of your Divine Master! [2 Timothy 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.21)."

Of those who come to Heaven, as all, more or less, must be content to do, through much tribulation, not one ever did, or ever shall, complain, that his trials have been too great. Our passage to Heaven may be laborious; but our eternal rest shall amply compensate for all our labors!

#464

DEATH

**[Job 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.10)**

"Man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more."

Afflictions, while they wean us from the love of this present world, serve to familiarize us with the thoughts of death, and to make that which to our nature is terrible, an object of desire and hope! See [Job 7:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.1-10) and [Job 14:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.1-2). But it is proper for us to contemplate "death" while we are yet in a state of health and prosperity; and, especially, to make the removal of others to the eternal world an occasion of considering what our own state may shortly be.

Man consists of soul and body. These, in death, are separated; the body returning to its native dust, and "the soul returning to God who gave it." This separation must soon take place, whatever be our rank, our age, our employment. The very instant that "our soul is required of us," it must be surrendered up; nor can the skill of all the physicians in the universe enable us to ward off the stroke of death one single hour!

And when the hour arrives for "man to give up the spirit, where is he?" While he is yet alive, we may find him. His office in life will assist us in our inquiry. The student, the mechanic, the man of pleasure, yes, and even the traveler, may be sought for, each in his own vocation, and may be found without great difficulty. But who shall find the man, when once his spirit has taken its flight to the invisible world? No more shall he return to his former abode; no more have fellowship with his former friends. The house he has built, or the books he has written, may remain; but he himself shall be far away, and the place he has inhabited shall know him no more. A tree that is cut down may sprout again; but not so the man that dies—he shall pass away as a morning cloud, and be seen no more! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10).

1. After death, where is a man as to any opportunity of serving God?

Once, he had one talent at least committed to him, and he might have improved it for God; but now it is taken from him. Whatever he once possessed of corporeal or mental power, of time, of wealth, of influence, is all gone forever; and he can do no more for God than if he had never existed in the world!

2. After death, where is a man as to any means of benefitting his own soul?

Time was, when he could read the blessed book of God, and draw near to the throne of grace, and pour out his soul in prayer, and lay hold on the promises of the Gospel, and seek from the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, such communications of grace and mercy and peace as were needful for him. But this time is passed away; no access to God now; no help from the Savior now; no scope for repentance now; none of these things remain to a soul that is once removed to the eternal world! verse 7-12. The work that is unfinished now will remain unfinished forever.

3. After death, where is a man as to any hope of carrying into effect his purposes and resolutions?

There are few so hardened, but they have some thought or purpose of turning unto God before they die. To the mirthful, the laborious, the dissolute—the fit time for religious services has not yet arrived; but all have a secret conviction, that the concerns of the soul deserve some attention; and they hope that, in a dying-hour at least, they shall regard what, in despite of all their levity, they know to be the one thing needful.

Perhaps the young only waited until they were settled in life; or until their children should be grown up, and leave them more at leisure to follow the dictates of their better judgment. Perhaps those who were immersed in earthly cares only waited until they should be able to retire from the world, and to devote a good measure of their attention to heavenly things. But "the day is closed upon them; and the night has come in which no man can work;" "their soul being, as it were, prematurely and unexpectedly required of them," their hopes are never realized, their desires never are accomplished!

4. After death, where is a man as to any possibility of preparing for his eternal state?

The fight is terminated; the race is closed; the crown is awarded. There is no return to the field of action; no further scope for amended efforts. "As the tree falls, so it lies;" and so it will lie to all eternity. Pardon, peace, holiness, glory, are all at an unapproachable distance to him who dies without having attained the possession of them. There is an impassable gulf between him and Heaven; and he must take his portion forever in that place for which alone he is prepared!

Permit me, then, now to ask:

1. If the time had come for us to "give up our spirit," **where would we be**?

This is a thought which ought frequently and deeply to occupy all our minds. Of individual people we can know but little; but respecting characters we may form a very correct judgment.

For instance, we know where the man who dies impenitent shall be, [Luke 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.3); [Luke 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.5).

We know where the man who has not fled to Christ for refuge shall be, [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36).

We know where also the hypocritical professor shall be, [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23).

And if we will candidly search out our own character, we may form a very accurate estimate respecting our future destination. I beg you, then, to examine carefully into the state of your own souls, in reference to your penitence; your faith; your obedience to God's commands; and then to say, as before God, what expectations the result of that inquiry will authorize?

Reflect, too, I beg you, on the inconceivable difference of those two states, to one of which you must go. Reflect also on the different emphasis with which the my text will be uttered by your surviving friends, according as their hopes or apprehensions respecting you are formed.

2. As the time for your giving up the spirit will shortly come, "**Where should you now be**?"

Are the scenes of gaiety and dissipation those which you should chiefly desire? Should not rather the house of God be the place where you should delight to resort? And should not your own closet be frequented by you for the purposes of reading scripture, and meditation, and prayer? In a word, should you not live as dying men, and improve your time in preparation for eternity? Realize the thought of your feelings in that day, when, in the eternal world, you shall say, "Where am I?"

O! the blessedness of that reflection, if you died in a state of acceptance with God; and the anguish it will occasion, if you died under his displeasure! I beg you, brethren, waste no more time in vanity and folly, but attend now to the great concerns of your souls; that, if the inquiry be made either here or in the invisible world, "Where is he?" the answer may be, "He is happy forever, in the bosom of his God!"

#465

THE CHANGE THAT TAKES PLACE AT DEATH

**[Job 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.14)**

"All the days of my appointed time I will wait, until my change comes."

"Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? [Job 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.1)." Yes, there is; the time for every man's entrance into the world, and the time for his continuance in it, are fixed by Almighty God, from whose hand we come, and by whose hand alone we are upheld.

Successive generations arise, and are swept away, like the foliage, which by revolving seasons is produced and destroyed. But in this the illustration fails, "for there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground—yet, through the scent of water, it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant! But man dies, and wastes away; yes, "man gives up his spirit, and where is he?" "As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decays and tries up; so man lies down, and rises not, until the heavens are no more, verse 7-12."

The change at death is irreversible! Therefore, whether a man is now elated with joys or depressed with sorrows—it befits him to look ahead to that period, when all present things shall have passed away—and an eternity, an unalterable eternity, shall commence!

In the prospect of this period, Job consoled himself under his accumulated sorrows; and determined to wait with patience all the days of his appointed time, until this change should come.

I. Consider: What is that change that awaits us all?

The voice of inspiration tells us, "It is appointed unto men once to die; and after that the judgment! [Hebrews 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.27)."

1. The change that takes place in death is **great**.

That which passes upon the body we can in some measure appreciate; because we see before our eyes the frame which but lately exhibited the loveliest evidences of creative wisdom, despoiled of all its powers, and reduced to the lowest state of degradation and deformity.

But who can estimate the change which death produces on the soul? Who can form any adequate idea of its views and feelings in a disembodied state? Respecting it we know little more than that it exists; of the mode of its existence, or the nature of its operations, or the extent of its powers—we have no means of judging. That it is in a state of inconceivable happiness or inconceivable misery, indeed, we have no doubt; but all beyond that is mere conjecture. This, however, sufficiently warrants us to affirm that the change which takes place in death is great.

2. The change that takes place in death is **momentous**.

It is a transition, not only from the use of means to the absence of all means of grace, but from a state of probation to a state of retribution. Here on earth we can read the Word of God, and hear it from God's appointed ministers. Here we can draw near to God in prayer, and implore mercy at his hands, and plead his great and precious promises, and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us.

In our present state there is "a cloud of witnesses," surveying all our motions, and, with affectionate solicitude, panting for our success, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1). God himself is watching over us, and saying, "How shall I give you up? [Hosea 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8)." "Will you not be made clean? When shall it once be? [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.27)." But the very instant that the soul departs from the body, its state is fixed; all opportunities of promoting its welfare are terminated, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10); and a sentence of happiness or misery is awarded to it, according to what it has done in the body during the period of its existence here.

The awfulness of this change is yet further increased by the following,

3. The change that takes place in death is **permanent**.

True it is, indeed, that the body shall undergo a further change; because it will be raised again, to participate the lot which had been previously assigned to the soul. But, from the instant of its dissolution, its doom was fixed; and to all eternity it will remain an heir of happiness or woe.

Conceive of the soul and body exalted to the throne of God, to enjoy all his blessedness and glory; or cast down to Hell, to endure all the terrors of his wrath! Conceive its state irreversibly and unalterably fixed, so that, when millions of ages shall have rolled on, it shall be no nearer a termination than at its commencement! In what a view does this exhibit the change that shall take place at death! Truly, this is a subject which deserves the deepest consideration, and which, above all others, ought to operate with the greatest force upon our minds!

II. Consider: What is our present duty in reference to death?

We should continually look forward to that change, and "wait" for it in a state:

1. Of patient expectation.

When trouble comes upon us, we are apt to feel impatience, and are ready, like Elijah, to pray that "God would take away our life." Many, alas! proceed even to the extremity of terminating their lives by suicide; and I cannot but think that the act of suicide would be still more common, if the dread of a hereafter did not operate to produce a submission to present afflictions, as, upon the whole, a preferable alternative. But we should bear in mind:  
that "the number of our days is determined" by our unchangeable Maker;  
that they are continually and speedily drawing to a close;  
that, in a little time, our afflictions, however great they may at present be, will come to a close;  
and, consequently, like people waiting for the morning, we should submit with patience to the evils of the night.

2. Of diligent preparation.

The present is the only time for securing happiness in the eternal world. Now, therefore, every hour should be improved for that end. Whatever talents have been committed to us, we should employ them so as to give a good account of them at last. If we have but one talent, we should not hide it in a napkin, but turn it to the best account that we are able; so that our Divine Master may, at his coming, receive his own with interest.

Let this subject teach us:

1. The folly of worldly ambition.

What if we possessed all that the world could give? We might speedily, like Job, be dispossessed of all, or be rendered incapable of enjoying it. At all events, the instant our "change" comes—we must resign it all, and go naked out of the world, even as naked as we came into it. Who that reflects on this, does not see that vanity is inscribed on all created good?

2. The wisdom of genuine piety.

Genuine piety is that which alone will profit us in the eternal world; and the effects of that remain unchangeable for evermore. Know, then, that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise! [Psalm 111:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.10)."

#466

THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING IN VANITY

**[Job 15:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.31)**

"Do not let him who is deceived trust in vanity; for vanity shall be his recompense."

The friends of Job were enlightened and pious men; but they altogether mistook the character of Job, and misinterpreted the dispensations of God towards him. They had assumed a principle which they carried too far; they laid it down as an invariable rule, that hypocrites would be visited with some peculiar judgments, and that extraordinary afflictions were in themselves a proof of some extraordinary wickedness which had procured them. But though they were mistaken in this, their observations are frequently most weighty and important. The words in our text are a kind of general truth, founded upon what Eliphaz had spoken in reference to Job. As applied to Job, it was not by any means pertinent; but as an abstract truth, it is deserving of our deepest attention.

I. Let us consider **the caution**.

People are universally "deceived" through the influence of:  
their corrupt heart,  
a tempting world,  
and a subtle adversary.

And that deception manifests itself particularly in the "trust" which they place in "lying vanities."

1. They trust in **vain conceits**.

People think themselves to be possessed of goodness and righteousness in such a degree, to warrant their expectation of happiness and blessedness in the eternal world. Tell them from God's Word, that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked—and they will deny your opinions as utterly false, and ridicule them as madness. They have no idea that they need:  
the influences of the Holy Spirit to enlighten their minds,  
or the blood of Christ to atone for their sins,  
or the grace of Christ to renovate their hearts.

But let them examine their boasted attainments, and see whether they amount to anything more than "vanity."

Let them see whether their wisdom has made them like-minded with God.

Let them bring their goodness to the touchstone of God's law.

Let them try their strength in any act of spiritual obedience.

Let them see if they can love God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength.

Then they must soon be convinced that they are trusting to a mere vanity!

2. They trust in **vain possessions**.

If a man possesses much of this world's goods he presently trusts in it for happiness, [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17), "his wealth is his strong city, [Proverbs 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.15);" and he says to gold, "You are my confidence! [Job 31:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.24)."

But is not wealth also vanity? What can it do to assuage our anguish? Or what stability is there in the possession of it? Do not "riches often make themselves wings, and fly away?" Or, when we are saying, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry;" may not God reply, "You fool! this night shall your soul be required of you!"

Let it not be said that men do not trust in riches; for the reverse is manifest beyond the possibility of contradiction, seeing that the acquisition of wealth is regarded as the chief step towards happiness; and men bestow ten-fold more pains in the attainment of it, than they do in the pursuit of Heaven!

3. They trust in **vain hopes**.

Everyone hopes that he shall be happy when he dies. But, if we "ask men a reason of the hope that is in them," they can make no reply that will at all justify their expectations. They will say, that they live as well as others, and that God is too merciful to condemn them; but as for any Scriptural reason, they can assign none!

What a vanity then is this! If a man were hoping for a harvest while he neglected to use the proper means to obtain one—would not his folly be manifest to all? Why then will men dream of going to Heaven when they die, not only without having one word in all the inspired volume to warrant such a hope, but in direct opposition to the plainest declarations of God concerning them? Is not this a strange infatuation—a fatal delusion?

4. They trust in **vain purposes**.

There is no one so hardened, but he intends at some future period to repent. All who have ever reflected on the value of their souls, or the importance of eternity, must have purposed in their minds that they would prepare to meet their God. But in this state they continue without carrying their purposes into execution.

The young confess the necessity of repentance, and declare their intention to repent in the future; but they arrive at manhood, and genuine repentance is unattained.

They proceed to a more advanced period of life, and even to old age, and genuine repentance is still as far from them as ever!

Thus they live, always purposing, but never accomplishing their purpose, until the time for working is forever past!

Can there be a greater vanity than this? And does not the trusting in such a vanity prove a man to be deceived?

That we may not ourselves be guilty of this folly,

II. Let us consider the reason with which the caution is enforced.

"Do not let him who is deceived trust in vanity; for vanity shall be his recompense."

God has wisely ordained that men should reap according to what they sow, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8). [Proverbs 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.8). And it will surely be found, sooner or later, that "they who trust in vanity, shall have vanity for their recompense!"

1. They shall reap **disappointment**.

God alone is the proper object of our trust and confidence, because he alone can support us, and make us eternally happy.

If we have looked to sin for happiness, we will venture to ask, with the Apostle, "What fruit have we now of those things whereof we are ashamed?"

If we have sought happiness in things lawful, still we must confess, that the creature, however excellent in itself, is but a broken cistern that can hold no water, and that must consequently fail us when we most need its support.

We may fitly compare those who expect solid satisfaction in the creature, to a man almost famished who dreams that he is eating and drinking, but awakes afterwards as empty and unsatisfied as before! [Isaiah 29:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.8). Truly, "he fills his belly with the east wind, verse 2;" and his fairest prospects shall "be as the unripe grape shaken off from the vine, or the blossom cast off from the olive tree! verse 33."

2. They shall reap **vexation**.

Solomon has observed respecting all the choicest things under the sun, that they are "vanity and vexation of spirit;" and the experience of all attests the truth of his observation. The more we trust in the creature, the more pain, generally speaking, it will occasion us; it will not only be a broken staff that refuses to support us, but a sharp "reed that will pierce through the hand that leans upon it! 2 Kings 18:21."

When Ahaz relied upon the Assyrian monarch to extricate him from his troubles, he found nothing but additional vexation, "Tiglath-pileser distressed him, but helped him not, 2 Chronicles 28:16; [2 Chronicles 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.20)."

Thus it will be with all who trust in vanities of any kind, or seek for happiness in anything but God. They may not yet have reached the crisis of their fate; but vanity and vexation are inseparable, both in this world and in the world to come. They may think that they have a feast to come; but while dreaming of something pleasing to their palate, they will find that they are "feeding on ashes, and a deceived heart has turned them aside! [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20). [Ecclesiastes 5:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.16-17)."

3. They shall reap **ruin**.

We well know how the tasting of the forbidden fruit, which promised such gratification and benefit to our first parents, terminated, and what misery it brought on them and their posterity.

Just so, the same recompense awaits us also, if we trust in lying vanities, instead of depending wholly on our God.

Hear what God himself says respecting this, "Cursed be the man who trusts in man, and that makes flesh his arm, and whose hope departs from the Lord! [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5)." How should we tremble at such a denunciation as this! O let it have a befitting influence on our minds; and stimulate us to seek our happiness where alone it can be found.

We **conclude** with observing:

1. How necessary is it to accurately understand the state and habit of our minds!

If it were said that only gross sin should issue in eternal misery, we would not be surprised. But we are told that the mere "trusting in vanity," independent of any gross sins which may flow from it, "will have vanity for its recompense."

Let us look then not to our actions only, but to the state and habit of our minds; since our happiness both in time and in eternity depends no less on the latter than on the former.

Let us not be satisfied that we are free from any flagrant transgressions, while we are relying on anything besides God.

Let us observe whether we practically feel the emptiness of all created things, and their utter insufficiency to make us happy either here or hereafter. And let us be going forth to God in the constant exercise of prayer, and "commit our souls to him in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator."

2. How thankful we should be, that there is an all-sufficient Friend in whom we may trust!

God in Christ is the only legitimate object of our hope and confidence! We are told, under the figure of Eliakim, that "Christ has the key of David; that he opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens; and that on him must hang all the glory of his Father's house! [Isaiah 22:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.20-24)." "Every vessel in the Lord's house, whether great or small, must hang on him;" and every care must be devolved on him.

In Jesus there is a fullness of all that we can need for time and eternity. In Him there is:  
wisdom for the blind,  
righteousness for the guilty,  
sanctification for the polluted,  
and redemption for the enslaved!  
Jesus is all of this to those who trust in him!

Be thankful then, brethren, for such a friend, and for the command given to you by God, "Trust in him at all times!" Rejoice that he can bear your every burden, and supply your every need!

Just as those who trust in vanity will have vanity for its recompense; so a "confidence in Jesus will have a great, rich, everlasting recompense of reward! [Hebrews 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.35)."

#467

JOB'S CONSCIOUS INTEGRITY

**[Job 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 16.19)**

"Now, behold, my witness is in Heaven, and my record is on high."

Greatly was this holy man afflicted by his own friends, who came to condole him; so that he was constrained to say, "Miserable comforters are you all! verse 2." Yet was he not wholly destitute of comfort; because he had the testimony of his own conscience, that, to the best of his ability, he had approved himself both to God and man; for neither had there been any injustice in his hands towards man, nor had his prayer been hypocritical before, God verse 17. Had he been guilty of any secret oppression, he wished the earth to disclose it, and his very prayers also to be rejected by his God, verse 18; but he could appeal to the heart-searching God himself for his integrity, "Now, behold, my witness is in Heaven, and my record is on high."

It shall be my endeavor:

I. To unfold this passage in reference to Job.

These words may be understood as containing:

1. An unquestionable truth.

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." There is not an abomination in the heart, which is not seen by God, nor one that is not noticed in the book of his remembrance as a ground of his future judgment. To this the whole Scripture bear witness, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them! [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.5)." "I search the heart and try the thoughts, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings! [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.10)." On the other hand, there is not a holy motion in the heart, but God notices it in the same manner, and for the same end.

"There was some good thing in the heart of young Abijah, [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13);" and God made that the ground of distinguishing him above all his brethren, who were wholly given to iniquity. And where God is said to write in the book of his remembrance the conferences of his people, he is represented as taking peculiar notice of the thoughts of those who listen, no less than of the words of those who speak; so observant is he of every the minutest good that can be imagined. The sigh, the groan, the very look—is understood by him, and regarded with delight; and every tear is treasured up in his vial! [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.8), and shall be exhibited by him, in the last day, in attestation of our sincerity.

"When you were under the fig-tree, I saw you, [John 1:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.48)," is a specimen of the testimony he will bear to our most hidden dispositions and desires.

2. A consolatory reflection.

Inexpressibly painful must have been the judgment of his misguided friends! Indeed, appearances were much against him; for why should he be called to endure such complicated and unparalleled afflictions, if he did not merit them? And, if he did merit them, what a consummate hypocrite must he have been, to have gained so high a reputation for piety! Such was the interpretation which his friends put upon the troubles that had come upon him. They thought that the dispensations of Providence were a sufficient criterion whereby to estimate a man's character, particularly when they were so extraordinary and unprecedented as those which they now beheld. But Job knew that their accusations were unfounded, and their decision was altogether unmerited.

The testimony of his conscience, therefore, afforded him great consolation. He knew that God had witnessed in him a far different conduct from that which his uncharitable friends imputed to him, and that God's record concerning him differed widely from theirs. To God, therefore, he committed his case, not doubting but that, when his sentence should be declared, it would be the very reverse of that which they so ignorantly passed upon him. Hence he felt as the Apostle did afterwards, under the imputations cast on him, "It is a small matter to me to be judged by you, or of man's judgment; yes, I judge not my own self; but he who judges me is the Lord, [1 Corinthians 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3-4)."

3. A solemn appeal.

There are many instances wherein the people of God have made their appeal to him, respecting things of which he alone could judge. Thus, Samuel, [1 Samuel 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.5); and David, [Psalm 18:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.23-24); [Psalm 40:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.9); and Paul, [Romans 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.9). 2 Corinthians 1:23. [Philippians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.8); frequently called God to witness, either their innocence of evils imputed to them, or their performance of things to which he alone was privy.

It is in this sense, chiefly, that the words of my text are to be understood. In this view they have the nature of an oath, and should have put an end to all further controversy on the subject. In another place Job makes a similar appeal to God, and says, "You know I am not wicked," that is, willfully and deliberately wicked, [Job 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.7). And happy was he, in having such a witness as could not err, and such a record as could never be set aside.

Such being, as I conceive, the import of this passage, I shall now:

II. Improve it in reference to ourselves.

To every description of person is this passage capable of most profitable application. And I would, in reference to it, address:

1. The formalist.

You, because of the constancy of your observances, are ready to persuade yourselves that you are accepted by your God. But what, I would ask, is the witness which you have in Heaven, and what is the record that is on high concerning you? Can the testimony of the heart-searching God be in your favor? Must it not rather be to this effect? 'I never saw you weeping for your sins; never did I behold you fleeing to Christ with anything approaching to the earnestness with which a manslayer fled from his pursuer to the city of refuge. Never did I hear you surrendering up yourselves wholly to the Lord, as his redeemed people. As far as outward services have gone, you have been forward enough; but to real vital religion you have been utter strangers!

Consider, brethren, I beg you, what reply you will make to such a testimony as this. You cannot set it aside; your own consciences attest the truth of it; yet, if it is true, what hope can you have before God? Indeed, indeed, you do but deceive your own souls, while you rest "in a form of godliness, and are destitute of its power!"

2. The hypocrite.

Well I know, that none will conceive themselves addressed under such a character as this. And I hope that there are none here to whom this character really appertains. But let me ask, Are there none who have embraced the Gospel as a system, and yet never been cast into the mold of it, so as really to be assimilated to their Lord in the spirit and temper of their minds? Can God say concerning all of you, "I have witnessed:  
the subjugation of your passions,  
the mortification of your lusts, and  
the entire change of all your tempers; so that you are:  
no longer proud, and passionate, and vindictive, in your spirit;  
no longer earthly and sensual in your desires;  
no longer cold and formal in your duties;  
but you have become humble, meek, forgiving, towards men; pure, spiritual, and heavenly, in your own souls; and devout and holy before God."

What do you say? Can the heart-searching God bear this testimony respecting you? Is this the habit which every hour bears to Heaven, to be recorded there?

Tell me, brethren, what does conscience say to this? Truly, it must be feared that the experience of many will not bear this test; but that their own consciences at this moment condemn them as guilty of gross, and flagrant, and frequent inconsistencies; and, "if your own hearts condemn you, remember that God is greater than your hearts, and knows all things."

It is to little purpose that your external conduct is approved; for "God looks at the heart;" and expects that you "be renewed in the spirit of your mind." He will bring all your tempers end dispositions under examination at the last day; and, if he cannot bear witness to the loveliness of them here—then you may be assured that you can have no favorable testimony from him hereafter. You may forget your actings of pride and envy, of uncharitableness and discontent, of covetousness and impurity—but God records them all in the book of his remembrance, and will surely bring them forth, to the confusion and condemnation of your souls, if you do not get them washed away in the Redeemer's blood, and mortified through the influences of his Holy Spirit. I beg you to remember, that it is by your fruits that the tree will be estimated; and, according as they shall be found, you will either be translated to Heaven, or cast into the lake of fire, to be the fuel of God's righteous indignation through all eternity!

3. The calumniated.

It is possible that some of you, like Job, may lie under censures which you do not deserve, and may "have things laid to your charge which you never knew." It is possible, too, that appearances may be against you; as was the case with Joseph in Potiphar's palace; and with Benjamin, when Joseph's cup was found upon him. Should this be your unfortunate condition, commit, with all humility, your cause to God, and leave yourselves altogether in his hands.

Doubtless it is extremely painful to be calumniated and traduced; but the testimony of a good conscience is sufficient to support you, especially when confirmed by the witness of God's Spirit in your souls. You remember "how many charges were brought against our blessed Lord; yet he never answered a word, insomuch that the governor marveled greatly." Imitate you Him in this respect. Be not too eager about the vindication of yourselves; but let your life speak, and your spirit speak; and the time shall speedily arrive, if not in this world—yet certainly in the life to come, when your character shall be cleared, and your righteousness shine forth as the noonday sun.

4. The sincere.

It is an unspeakable consolation to know that God is acquainted with all that passes in our hearts! If he knows our defects, he also knows our humiliation on account of them. He knows what conflicts we sustain, and what victories we gain through the mighty operation of his Spirit on our souls. And if we are "Israelites indeed without deceit," he will bear witness to it before the whole assembled universe, and grant to us the richest tokens of his mercy and love.

Be watchful, then, against every deviation from duty, even in thought; and labor incessantly to "keep a conscience void of offence, towards both God and man." Bear in mind, that the eye of God is ever upon you; and endeavor constantly to walk as in his immediate presence. Thus will you approve yourselves to him, and ensure from him in judgment that testimony of his approbation, "You have been faithful over a few things; be ruler over many things; enter into the joy of your Lord!"

#468

DARK DISPENSATIONS OVERRULED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SAINTS

**[Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9)**

"The righteous shall hold on his way, and he who has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

Among all the doctrines of our holy religion, there is not one more difficult to be received than that which here offers itself to our notice; it may well be numbered among "the deep things of God." The manner too, in which it has been professed by men of enthusiastic minds, or antinomian habits—has rendered it odious in the eyes of thousands, who yet are truly upright before God. But neither the difficulty of guarding it from abuse, nor the averseness of men to embrace it—must deter us from stating what we believe to be the truth of God.

We would not needlessly go out of our way to introduce a subject of such difficult discussion; nor, on the other hand, would we feel justified in passing it by, when it comes fairly before us; we are bound "to declare unto you," as far as we are able, "the whole counsel of God." The doctrine we allude to is that which is generally called, The perseverance of the saints; and it is evidently contained in the words of our text.

Job, seeing how all his friends were puzzled and confounded by the mysterious dispensation under which he was suffering, consoled himself with the thought, that, when the outcome of it should be seen, it should greatly promote the edification of all who were truly upright; people who were unsound or hypocritical might be discouraged by it; but "the upright and innocent" would rescue it from abuse; and would take occasion from it to pursue their course with augmented steadiness and zeal.

Agreeably to this view of our text, we will proceed to state:

I. The general principles upon which the perseverance of the saints is founded.

There is in the souls of the regenerate a principle which is in its own nature imperishable and indestructible; and in support of this opinion, they appeal to several passages of Scripture which seem to establish this fact. They say, that "we are born of incorruptible seed, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23);" that, "because this seed remains in us, we cannot sin, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9);" and that it must of necessity "spring up unto everlasting life, [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14)." We think that there is in the Holy Scripture sufficient foundation for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. It may be proved:

1. From the immutability of God.

It is "from God that every good and perfect gift proceeds, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13);" even from Him "with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)." These gifts are the result of God's own eternal purpose and grace, [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9); and they are bestowed by him with a fixed purpose to render them effectual for the salvation of our souls, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13). Hence they are said to be "without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)," or change of mind in him who bestows them.

There is an inseparable connection between the original purpose formed in the divine mind, and the final completion of it in the salvation of the people thus chosen, [Romans 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29-30); and to this very immutability in the divine mind is the salvation of men expressly ascribed, [Malachi 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.9). "Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness, [2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19)."

2. From the covenant of grace.

In the covenant which God from all eternity entered into with his dear Son, [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2), there were a number given to Christ, to be his purchased possession, [John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6). In behalf of these, the Savior stipulated not only to redeem them by his blood, but also to keep them by his grace, [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12); and the Father also engaged, not only never to depart from them, but to secure them from ever finally departing from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40). Provision was made for them, that they should have "everything that pertained to life and godliness;" and the promises which assured these things to them, were made irrevocable, [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20); so that their consolation might be made abundant, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18), and their salvation sure! [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16).

On this covenant the Christian lays hold, [Isaiah 56:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.4); [Isaiah 56:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.6); and in an assured dependence on it he may say, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6);" and that nothing shall ever "separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)." In this covenant David felt his security, 2 Samuel 23:5; and in this may every believer trust, with humble, but unshaken, confidence, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12); [2 Timothy 4:8-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8-18).

3. From the intercession of Christ.

Whence was it that, when Peter and Judas resembled each other so much in their crimes, they differed so widely in their end; the one being restored to his apostleship, and the other being left to go to his own place? Our Lord himself tells us, "Peter, I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail, [Luke 22:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.32)." And to the same cause must be traced the restoration of all who are restored, and the stability of all who stand. Paul, in defying all his enemies, lays the chief stress on this; he mentions with gratitude a dying Savior; but glories more especially in the thought of Christ as risen, and as making continual intercession for the saints, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34), with [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10), and [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25). The Father always hears Jesus; and, while he "appears in the presence of God for us," "bearing our names on his breastplate," and "making intercession for us according to the will of God," we need not fear but that we shall in due time occupy "the mansions which he has prepared for us."

On these grounds we believe that the saints' perseverance in faith and holiness is secured.

II. The particular manner in which the most adverse circumstances shall be overruled to promote it.

This is the particular point to which our attention should be directed, in order to elucidate the true import of the text; for, in the text we have an assurance, not merely that the saints shall persevere, but that they shall persevere under circumstances which will prove a stumbling-block unto all whose hearts are not truly upright before God.

There are many circumstances which prove stumbling-blocks to the unsound professor. Among these we must first notice those which Job himself more especially refers to. Though he was perfect and upright in himself, he was oppressed with a heavier load of afflictions than ever fell to the lot of mortal man; and in the midst of them, appeared to be forsaken by his God. Now from such a dispensation, a man whose heart was not right with God would be ready to conclude that it was in vain to serve God; and that, if he is to be subjected to such trials as these, it would have been better at once to seek the happiness which the world affords; since God puts no difference between the righteous and the wicked.

But more especially, if there are heavy trials for righteousness' sake, the unsound professor is alarmed; and he draws back from an open confession of Christ, lest he should be involved in troubles which he is not willing to endure, [John 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.22).

But the greatest obstacle in the way of the unsound, arises from the falls of those who make a profession of religion. A man whose principles are not fixed, is ready to doubt whether there is any truth in the Gospel itself, when he sees a Judas and a Demas making shipwreck of their faith. Our blessed Lord told us, not only that such circumstances would arise, but that they would produce the most unhappy effects, "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! [Matthew 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.7)."

But all these adverse circumstances tend ultimately to the establishment of those who are truly upright.

The assurance that troubles do not spring out of the dust, composes their minds under the diversified trials of life; they know, that, whoever the instrument may be, it is God who uses it; and that He does all things well.

If persecution rages, he has counted the cost, and is "ready to suffer the loss of all things" for Christ's sake; yes, "he rejoices, if he is counted worthy to suffer for his Redeemer's sake." The imprisonment of Paul was designed to intimidate his followers, and to obstruct the progress of the Gospel; but "it turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel," inasmuch as multitudes were encouraged by his example to preach the truth with greater firmness and zeal, [Philippians 1:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12-14).

So also, if there is any public disgrace brought on the Gospel by the misconduct of those who have been regarded as eminent in the Church, the truly upright Christian is not at all shaken in his faith; he knows that the Gospel is wholly independent of those who profess it; if eleven of the Apostles had proved like Judas, he would not therefore have concluded that there was either less importance, or less efficacy, in the Gospel of Christ. He considers the gospel as standing on its own proper grounds; and he determines, through grace, to adhere to Christ, though all others should forsake him.

Here it may be well to mark more distinctly the operation of such circumstances on the true believer's mind.

Events like these humble him before God; they show him how weak he himself is, and how certainly he also shall fall and perish, if for one moment he is forsaken by God. They make him also more earnest in prayer to God. Seeing whence alone his strength must come, he cries day and night, "Hold up my goings in your ways, that my footsteps slip not." "Hold me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall observe Your statutes continually! [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117).

Moreover, he takes occasion from them to search and try more carefully his own heart, lest he also should have deceived his own soul. He is put also on his guard against temptations, and is made to watch more carefully against every occasion of sin.

Finally, he is made to feel the necessity of living more simply and entirely by faith in the Son of God, and of receiving out of his fullness those supplies of grace and strength, whereby alone he can hope to get the victory.

Thus those very events which weaken the hands, discourage the hearts, and subvert the faith of hypocrites, are overruled for the advancement and establishment of the righteous in every good word and work.

To guard against an abuse of this doctrine, we entreat you to bear in mind,

1. The characters who alone can take comfort in it.

It is "the righteous" only, and he who "has clean hands," who have any title to the promise before us, or who is in a fit state to derive any consolation from it. If any are walking in the habitual indulgence of either open or secret sin—he is a hypocrite before God; and to be left to "hold on his way," will be the heaviest curse that can be inflicted on him. Know, all of you, that "herein the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; he who does not righteousness is not of God! [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10)."

2. The way in which this doctrine should be improved.

It is not to create in anyone an unhallowed confidence, and to make him imagine that he may relax his exertions; but rather to encourage his exertions, from the assurance that they shall not be in vain, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58). Whatever confidence we may feel, it must always be blended with holy fear, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14). If the Apostle "kept under his body, lest after having preached to others he himself should become a castaway," then who among us will feel himself at liberty to remit his caution, or relax his diligence, in the ways of God?

"The path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day;" and while we have an evidence that our path accords with that description, we shall be in no danger of deceiving ourselves; but the very moment that our progress is doubtful, we have reason to inquire whether we are indeed upright before God. Use then this doctrine, not as an excuse for idleness, but as an incentive to diligence; that you may "not lose the things which you have wrought, but may receive a full reward."

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CHRIST A LIVING REDEEMER

**[Job 19:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.25-27)**

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another! How my heart yearns within me!"

The trials of the saints have not only been eminently conducive to their own good, but also productive of the best effects to the Church at large. It is in afflictive circumstances that their graces have shone most bright; and under them they have made the most glorious confessions, which have been recorded with admiration as long as the world shall stand.

Of all the calamities which Job endured, there was none more pungent than the uncharitable censures of his friends, which tended to rob him of his only consolation. But he rose superior to them all; and when he could not convince his friends by argument, he made his appeal to God, and wished it to be written for the vindication of himself, and the encouragement of others to the latest posterity. We shall point out,

I. The substance of Job's confession.

That Christ is the person spoken of, the very terms here used sufficiently declare.

Job speaks of Christ as then actually "living".

Doubtless Job was no stranger to the promise made to Adam respecting "the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head;" or to those so often repeated to Abraham, of a "seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed." The father of the faithful had anticipated the advent of that promised seed, and had rejoiced exceedingly in seeing, though at the distance of two thousand years, the day in which he should exist, [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.56). But Job seems not only to equal, but even to surpass that most distinguished "friend of God;" for he saw Christ as actually living; and understood that, which, when spoken by our Lord, so much confounded the Jewish doctors, "Before Abraham was, I am! [John 8:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.58)." Yes, Job beheld him in his pre-existent state, seventeen or eighteen hundred years before he became incarnate! He beheld him as having life in himself, and as being the same yesterday, today, and forever! [John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.4). [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8).

He even declares Christ to be "God".

The same person whom he calls "his Redeemer," he afterwards calls "God." And in this he is supported by numberless other testimonies of Holy Writ. The evangelical prophet tells us that the very same person who was "a child born, and a son given, was also the Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6);" and the New Testament assures us that He was "Emmanuel, God with us, even God manifest in the flesh, [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23). 1 Timothy 3:16." Job was accused of ignorance by his friends; but it is to be feared that they had not by any means such exalted views of Christ as he here exhibits.

This holy man yet further confesses Christ as "his Redeemer".

The word Goel imports the nearest of kin, in whom the right of redeeming any estate that had been sold was vested, [Leviticus 25:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.25). Behold then the depths of divine truths which had been revealed to Job! He sees his God incarnate; and himself as "a member of Christ's body, even of his flesh and of his bones, [Hebrews 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.11); [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15). [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30)." He sees Christ redeeming his soul from death and Hell; redeeming him at no less a price than his own blood; or, to use the words of an Apostle, he sees "God purchasing the Church with his own blood! [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)."

Nor does Job view him only as incarnate, or as dying for the redemption of man, but as coming again to "judge" the world.

The words used by Job might be applied to the incarnation and resurrection of Christ; but they seem rather to designate his appearance in the last day to judge the world. This office is "committed to Christ because he is the Son of man;" and when he shall execute it, "he will come from Heaven in like manner as he ascended up to Heaven;" He will not indeed any longer be seen in a state of weakness and humiliation, but "in all the glory of his Father and his holy angels;" nevertheless He will then appear "as a lamb that has been slain;" and will summon all those who pierced him to his tribunal.

But that which gives inexpressible dignity to this confession, is, the full assurance it expresses of Job's rising from the grave in that day to behold and enjoy Christ!

Job does not seem to have had any hope of restoration to temporal prosperity; but speaks in the most confident manner of his resurrection to eternal happiness. The destruction of his mortal frame by worms was not in his eyes any bar to its renovation in the last day. He knew that what was sown in corruption, weakness, and dishonor, should be raised in incorruption, power, and glory; that his vile body should be changed like unto Christ's glorious body! 1 Corinthians 15:42-43. [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21); and that when his earthly tabernacle should be dissolved, he had a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1). He knew that, having awakened after his Redeemer's likeness, he should behold him, not as now through a looking-glass darkly, but face to face, and dwell forever in his presence in fullness of joy! [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.12). [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2). [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11); [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15).

This re-union of his soul and body, together with the beatific vision of his glorified Redeemer, was the one object of his most earnest desires, and most assured hopes. And he was determined, notwithstanding all the accusations of his friends, to maintain "this rejoicing of his hope firm unto the end."

We shall endeavor to improve this subject by considering,

II. The **lessons** to be learned from it.

Whatever was written aforetime was written for our learning; and this confession in particular suggests to us that,

1. A full assurance of hope is attainable in this world.

Job's assurance seems to have been remarkably strong; he not only calls Jesus his Redeemer, but proclaims his confident expectation of dwelling with him forever; he speaks of this, not as a thing which he surmised, or hoped, but as what he "knew" for certain.

Nor was this a privilege peculiar to Job. Had not Paul also the same delightful confidence, when he said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day! [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12);" and again, when he professed that "henceforth there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge should give him, 2 Timothy 4:8." And has not the same Apostle bidden us all to show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, [Hebrews 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.11).

Why then should we rest satisfied without attaining this blessed hope?

Would it not serve as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, [Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19), amidst all the storms and billows of this tempestuous world?

Would it not be an effectual antidote to the poisonous breath of calumny, which will ever strive to blast the fairest characters?

Will not the testimony of a good conscience fill us with joy even when we are loaded with the bitterest accusations, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12).

Shall we not say with Paul, "It is a small matter with me to be judged by you or of man's judgment, yes, I judge not my own self, but he who judges me is the Lord, [1 Corinthians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3)."

Seek then to "know your election by God;" strive to make it sure and evident to yourselves, 1 Thessalonians 1:4; and be continually "living a life of faith in the Son of God," that you may be able to say, "He has loved me, and given himself for me! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

2. A clear knowledge of Christ in his person and offices is the best groundwork of an assured hope.

Though Job had been too ready to boast of his integrity, it was not on that that he founded his hopes of immortality and glory. He knew himself to be under the curse of God's broken law; and that Christ, as his Redeemer, was his "deliverer from that curse, having himself been made a curse for him." And what other foundations of hope can we have? Are we holier than Job, who notwithstanding all his holiness exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile!" Have we not at least as much reason as he to "abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

How then shall we pretend to be just before God? Let this be firmly settled in our minds, that we must flee to Christ for redemption, before we can know him to be our Redeemer. We must be united to him by faith, before we can claim him as our nearest kinsman. We must behold his glory now as it is exhibited in the looking-glass of the Gospel, if we would behold it with joy in the great day of his appearing.

Let us then seek to know Christ as he is revealed in the Word; let us "search the Scriptures, which testify of him," and pray for the illuminating influences of that Spirit, whose office is, to "glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are his, and showing them unto us."

Let us be ashamed that Job, who lived before there was any written record of Christ in the world, should know more of Christ than we, who live in the meridian splendor of gospel light. And, whatever we have attained, let us seek daily to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

3. There is no state, however afflictive, wherein an assurance founded on a saving knowledge of Christ will not support and comfort us.

It is worthy of observation, that from the instant Job uttered these words he was enabled to suppress, in a considerable measure, his bitter murmurings and complaints. And what greater support can any man need than to know that he has Christ for his redeeming God, and that after a few more conflicts he shall enjoy him forever, [1 Thessalonians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.17-18). We do not indeed expect that a person shall always be so elevated by these considerations, as to soar above all sense of his afflictions. But sometimes even this may be enjoyed; and at all times we may hope to "possess our souls in patience, until patience has its perfect work, and we be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

Let the sons and daughters of affliction then have recourse to this remedy; let them labor to attain a thankful sense that they have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and then they need not fear but that they shall be strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness, [Colossians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11-12). Let them seek an evidence that they are Christ's; let them beg the Holy Spirit to witness to their spirit that they are children of God; and then their trials, however grievous at the time, shall only serve as a boisterous wind, to waft them more speedily to their desired glorious harbor!

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AGAINST HYPOCRISY

**[Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.4-7)**

"Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since man was placed on the earth, that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment. Though his pride reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?' "

Prejudice or passion will miserably warp the mind's judgment. It will hide from us what we might know, and cause us to pervert what we do know.

Never was this more strongly exemplified than in the friends of Job. Had they calmly considered, they might have comforted him in his affliction; but, by a hasty misapplication of acknowledged truths, they most unjustly and cruelly condemned him. Job had hinted to them the evil and danger of their conduct, [Job 19:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.28-29). And Zophar, irritated at the caution, replies with great severity. His words, however, though misapplied, suggest to us two very important truths respecting lost sinners:

I. The prosperity of the wicked is transient.

Of sinners, some make no profession of religion, and others a false profession. Each of these characters may enjoy, for a while, great prosperity.

The profane are often exalted to places of dignity and power; they prosper in all their labors for wealth and advancement. They not only despise, but perhaps persecute the godly; they "triumph," as though no evil should ever happen unto them. This the Psalmist saw with deep regret, [Psalm 73:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3-12).

Hypocrites also frequently are held in estimation, [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1). They are objects of envy to many a humble and contrite soul. They will boast of experiences which might well be coveted; and even attain considerable heights of joy, [Matthew 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20). Their "excellency may mount up to the heavens, and their heads reach unto the clouds."

But their prosperity will be of short duration.

Death will speedily seize upon the most stout-hearted sinner! Then all that he gloried in, shall come to an end. None of his "pomp shall follow him," or his "wealth be carried with him."

The hypocrite also shall have an end put to his deceptions; he shall soon appear in his real character. The all-seeing God will reveal the secrets of his heart! Nor is this time at any great distance, [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35); in comparison with eternity, the duration of his joy will be "but a moment."

Then the wicked will experience a sad reverse.

II. The end of the wicked will be dreadful!

1. The wicked will then "perish" to their own eternal shame!

Many portions of Scripture appear to us indelicate; but God's representations of sin are surely just, and well calculated to make us loath it. Such is his description of the ways of sinners, [2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.22); and such his declaration respecting their end. Compare [Revelation 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16) with the text. They will perish under circumstances of disgrace and ignominy. Christ will not own them before his Father, [Matthew 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.33). The angels will come forth to execute the vengeance of God upon them. The saints would even "thrust them out of Heaven" if they should seek admittance there, [Luke 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.28). The damned themselves will insult them with bitter taunts, [Isaiah 14:9-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.9-16); nor shall they ever cease to be objects of contempt and abhorrence. This is told to us in the plainest terms, [Proverbs 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.5). [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2). Nor, while they retain, as they must, their character, is it possible that their situation ever should be changed? [Revelation 22:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.11).

2. The wicked will then "perish" to the astonishment of all that knew them!

The question, "Where is he?" refers primarily to the utter extinction of the ungodly; but it may well be considered also as an expression of surprise. The wicked little think where their course will terminate. If the rich man's request had been granted, [Luke 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.23); [Luke 16:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.27-28), then what reply would his surviving brethren have made so soon as that in the text.

They would most probably have exclaimed: 'Where it he? In Hell? Lifting up his eyes in torments? Is it really so? We never could have imagined it—we had no doubt but that he would be in Heaven. He seemed to us as worthy and blameless a character as any; nor had he himself any doubts but that he was going to Heaven!'

The hypocrites also often escape detection in this world. Perhaps they were celebrated after their departure, as eminent saints. We may conceive that their dearest friends, or their associates in holy exercises, may inquire after them in Heaven. What surprise and horror must seize them, when they hear of the doom which the heart-searching God has passed upon them!

If a minister is to have those as his "joy and crown of rejoicing," who were truly converted by his ministry—then we may, not improperly, suppose a degree of disappointment, if he misses those, concerning whom he had entertained the most optimistic hopes. We may suppose him, upon the first discovery, to say, 'Where is he! What, he is in Hell! I often feared that I myself would go there; but who would have ever thought that HE would be eternally damned!'

May the Lord grant that this may never be realized by any of us!!

ADDRESS

This has been so from the beginning of the world!

Does not the Word of God assert, that "it shall be woe to the wicked, [Isaiah 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.11). [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)." Does not the most authentic history in the world prove it to have been so? Where are now the antediluvian scoffers, the haughty Pharaoh, the treacherous Judas, the worldly-minded Demas, the heretical Hymeneus? etc.

Does not conscience itself testify that it shall be so still?

Consider this: Can anything be more worthy of our consideration? If we have "but a moment," should we not improve that moment? Are we willing to perish in this ignominious and awful manner?

Let us live no longer in the neglect of true religion.

The gratifications of sense can last but for a little time; but the consequences of neglecting God will endure forever. Surely the care of the soul is the "one thing needful."

Nor let us rest in a "form of godliness" without experiencing "its power".

It will avail us little to deceive our fellow-creatures. The higher we have been in their estimation, the deeper will be our disgrace. Let us then go to Christ for the remission of past sins. Let us approve ourselves to him in future, as "servants that need not be ashamed," and labor to be "sincere and without offence until his coming again."

#471

THE EMPTINESS OF EARTHLY POSSESSIONS

**[Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)**

"In the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him; the full force of misery will come upon him."

Men universally, by nature, seek their happiness in earthly things. And though they meet with continual disappointment, they will persevere in the same unprofitable course, "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which does not satisfy."

The question, "Who will show us any good?" is asked by every man; but it is the godly man alone who answers it aright, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon me!" The godly man attains the object of his pursuit; but the ungodly man finds, by bitter experience, that, whatever the measure of his success is in the attainment of earthly things, "In the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him."

From these words, I will take occasion to show what a poor wretched creature a mere worldly man is:

I. The worldly man as viewed in himself, is wretched.

It is here supposed, that he may not only possess a very large measure of earthly things, but may have a consciousness that his portion is, as it were, "shaken together, pressed down, and running over." Yet, in the midst of his plenty:

1. Distress will overtake the worldly man as it respects his **present enjoyments**.

Earthly things, of whatever kind they are—pleasures, riches, or honors—are all, in their nature, empty and unsatisfying. In their use, they are transient and cloying. In their effects, they are productive of trouble and vexation. Our blessed Lord has told us, that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses!" And Solomon, after trying all things to an extent that no other man ever did, has given us his testimony respecting them, that they are "all vanity and vexation of spirit!"

2. Distress will overtake the worldly man as it respects his **future prospects**.

Every man has a consciousness that there is a future state; and that earthly possessions, so far from advancing our preparation for it, tend rather to divert our attention from it, and to obstruct our progress in the heavenly life. It is no uncommon thing for a man, in the midst of all his earthly pleasures, to feel them embittered to him, by a consciousness that he is hastening to the eternal world, and is unprepared for it! In fact, though men may, for a season, shake off the thoughts of eternity, they cannot so divest themselves of it in a time of sickness, and in the approach of death, as not to feel exceedingly straitened in their spirit, and to acknowledge that they have been all their days following a phantom that has eluded their grasp and disappointed their expectations.

But, to see him in his true colors, look at:

II. The worldly man as viewed in contrast with a godly man, is wretched.

As an ungodly man may possess an abundance of earthly comforts—so may a godly man be reduced to great straits. We can scarcely conceive a more destitute condition than that of Lazarus, or that of those persecuted saints who "wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, [Hebrews 11:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.37-38)." Yet, as the worldling is in distress in the midst of his abundance, so the godly are in abundance in the midst of all their straits.

1. The godly enjoy much in **possession**.

The godly have peace with God; and that is more to them than ten thousand worlds. With this they are content and reconciled fully to their state, whatever that state may be. However great their distress may be, they are resigned to it as their father's will, and they assure themselves that "all things shall work together for their good." They know that "their affliction is but light and momentary, and that it is working out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" Hence, so far from being dejected by their trials, they even "glory in them," and find them a source of solid satisfaction, 2 Corinthians 12:10.

2. The godly enjoy much in **future hope**.

The godly are enabled to look up to Heaven, with an assurance, that, however destitute here, they have in that blessed world "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that never fades away." They have already a foretaste of that bliss, in "a spirit of adoption," and in the sealing of the Spirit, which is to them "a pledge" of what they are speedily to enjoy in all its fullness. How empty do all earthly things appear to him, while in such an elevated state as this! A king upon his throne, if not possessed of these spiritual treasures, is to him an object of pity rather than of admiration and envy; so infinitely is the worldly man below the child of God! The worldly man, in having all things, possesses nothing; but the saint, while "having nothing, in reality possesses all things! [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)."

APPLICATION.

1. Never seek happiness in a way of sin.

Sin may afford a present gratification; but, though it be as honey in the mouth, it will be bitter in the belly! So we are told in the preceding context, verse 12-14; and so it is found by every man.

2. Do not be too intent upon having the things of this world.

In earthly business, of whatever kind, we may be diligent. Yes, and great diligence will consist with great fervor of spirit, and spirituality of mind, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11). But "our affections are not to be set on things below." In Heaven alone is the treasure which we are to desire; and "where that is, our heart must be also."

3. Seek your happiness in God alone.

There can be no disappointment in that which will make you rich in possession, and in reversion too; for if Christ be yours, "all other things must of necessity be yours also; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come. All are yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's! [1 Corinthians 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-23)."

#472

CONDUCT OF SINNERS TOWARDS GOD

**[Job 21:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14-15)**

"Yet they say to God:  
 Leave us alone!  
 We have no desire to know your ways.  
 Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?  
 What would we gain by praying to him?"

As in the speeches of Job's different friends, so in his answers to them, we must ever bear in mind the ground of their controversy. This, as we have often mentioned before, was a persuasion on their part that God in his providence would mark the characters of men by his dealings towards them; and that signal judgments of any kind were sufficient, without any other evidence whatever, to prove the pre-eminent wickedness of the person on whom they were inflicted. The different speakers indeed all wander occasionally from the point, and launch out into other topics; but all intended to keep this point in view, and to make it the ultimate object of their discourse.

The friends of Job had maintained their side of the question with great confidence, and had driven him more immediately to vindicate himself in opposition to the implied charge contained in their arguments; but here Job speaks less of himself, and directs his answer more clearly to the general question. He shows that multitudes of those who prospered in the world were altogether addicted to impiety; yes, that their very prosperity was made by them an occasion of more determined hostility to God, and yet God continued to prosper them both in life and in death, so far, at least, as to exempt them from any remarkable judgments either in the one or the other.

The impiety of these people, as described in our text, must not be interpreted literally, as if the words here used were uttered with their lips; they must be understood as marking rather the language only of their hearts and lives; and in this view they will be found to designate with equal truth the dispositions and habits of ungodly men in all ages.

In evincing this, we shall:

I. Confirm the assertion in our text.

The assertion itself is most humiliating, seeing that it lays to the charge of unconverted men these two enormous crimes:  
first, that they cast off all regard for God;  
next, that they vindicate their conduct as reasonable and proper.

1. Now that this is a just description of unregenerate men, we appeal to **observation**.

What is the conduct of the generality, when the light of divine truth is set before them? Do they not shut their eyes against it? Even the public exhibition of it they do not like; but if a pious minister or friend speaks personally to them in secret, they rather resent it as an insult, than accept it with gratitude. And by the aversion to holy things which they manifest, they, in effect, say to God, "Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways."

If an attention to heavenly things is urged from a regard to duty and self-interest, the generality will deny that a life of godliness is either necessary or profitable. They conceive, that their time and talents are altogether their own, to be employed according to their own will and pleasure; and that all serious piety, and a life of communion with God—are sources rather of pain and melancholy, than of peace and happiness.

2. Now that this is a just a description of unregenerate men, we appeal to **experience**.

What does every man's own heart declare? Let us all look Lack and see, What has been our conduct in relation to this matter? Have we desired the knowledge of God's ways, as we have of the ways that lead to worldly honor and self-interest? Have we not, on the contrary, when God, by his providence, his Word, his Spirit, has been knocking at the door of our hearts, said to him, "Depart from me; I have other occupations and interests to attend to; You must wait for a more convenient season?"

If pressed by the exhortations of a faithful friend or minister, have we not vindicated ourselves as acting a wise and rational part; and asserted, (by our conduct at least,) that such a devotedness to God as was required of us was neither necessary nor desirable?

Yes truly, we all have "hated the light, [John 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19-20)," have wished it to be withheld from us, [Isaiah 30:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.10-11), have "rebelled against it," when it has flashed conviction on our consciences, [Job 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 24.13), and have determined to go on our own way, in spite of all God's warnings and invitations, [Jeremiah 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.16-17); [Jeremiah 44:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.15-17). By this resistance to God we have in fact:  
denied his authority over us, [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2). [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4). [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31),  
avowed ourselves his decided enemies, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7),  
and lived without him in the world! [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12).

Let us now proceed,

II. To suggest some reflections naturally arising from it.

1. How marvelous is the patience of God!

The conduct above described is not peculiar to men of an abandoned character; it is found in every man. There are indeed some people comparatively religious. Of these it may be said, that they pretend religion, and even glory in the distinction which they assume to themselves as people fearing God and working righteousness.

But, in truth, there are no people more decidedly hostile to the Gospel than those whom we now refer to. No man was ever more zealous for a certain kind of religion than Paul in his unconverted state; yet no man was ever a more bitter persecutor of the Church than he. And it is a fact, that, when the Jews at Antioch wished to expel Paul and Barnabas from their city, they could find no people that would enter more cordially into their views, or more vigorously execute their designs, than "the devout women, whom they stirred up" to endorse and aid their proceedings, [Acts 13:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.50).

"God's ways," whether of acceptance with him, or of obedience to him, are displeasing and irksome to the natural man; the one being too humiliating for him, and the other too strict and self-denying. And the contempt that is universally poured on those who "walk as Christ walked," is itself the most unequivocal proof of the universality of our departure from God, and our hatred of his ways!

How astonishing then is it, that God should bear with us a single hour! How astonishing then is it, that he does not now retaliate upon us, as he will do at the day of judgment, and say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" Let us then "account the patience of God to be salvation;" and "let his goodness and forbearance lead us to repentance."

2. What glorious tidings does the Gospel bring to our ears!

It was for such people that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, and offered himself a sacrifice to the offended Majesty of Heaven, "While we were enemies, Christ died for us!" To such people also are we sent, to offer them a free and full salvation; the extent or long continuance of their rebellion, is no bar to the exercise of divine mercy towards them, "Whoever comes unto me," says our Lord, "I will never cast him out."

O you who are convinced of your past iniquities, and are sensible of your need of mercy, hear what Paul affirms, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief!" Do not imagine that God is filled with resentment against you, as your earthly parents would have been, if you had so treated them; he is plenteous in mercy; and, if you will go to him, he will "give you his blessing liberally, without upbraiding."

If it is thought, that divine justice will require the execution of vengeance on such sinners as we—then be it known, that his justice is satisfied by the atonement which Christ has offered; and that he can now be "just, and yet the justifier of all them that believe."

3. What a blessed change takes place in the great work of conversion!

The inmost dispositions of the soul are changed by grace; so that he who recently said unto God, "Depart from me!" now desires his presence above all things, and pants after God as the deer after the water-brooks, and considers "his loving-kindness as better than life itself." Now he "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord."

Nor is it the principles only of the Gospel that he loves, but the precepts also; and the way of God's commandments is as much loved as the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. Now he feels that "he is not his own, but, having been bought with a price, is bound to glorify God with his body and his spirit which are God's."

Nor is it any longer a question with him, whether there is any profit in communion with God; he knows and feels that there is no employment under Heaven so profitable; and that, in fact, there is no profit in anything, not even in attending the ordinances or in reading the Word of God—unless a blessing is brought down upon the soul by fervent prayer.

Beloved, show the truth of your conversion by the change in your dispositions, your tempers, and your habits. If you are indeed brought forth into marvelous light—them "walk as children of the light and of the day." And as some remains of your former corruption will yet be found in you, be daily putting off the old man, and be putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness!

#473

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD

**[Job 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.21)**

"Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace."

In estimating the characters and conduct of men, we must make great allowance for their prejudices and mistakes.

Unless we take into our consideration the erroneous idea which Job's friends had conceived respecting the dealings of Providence with men, we shall be ready to view them in a most unfavorable light. Even with this allowance we scarcely know how to account for the extreme uncharitableness of Eliphaz. He is not content with accusing Job of secret sins that could be known to God alone, but he brings plain and positive charges against him of open visible crimes, no one of which could with even a shadow of truth be imputed to him. We regret to see such inconsistency in a man, whom yet we are constrained to consider as pious; and we turn from this painful view of him, to notice the excellent advice, which, though still under a mistaken apprehension of Job's character, he gave him.

To a person under any circumstances, an acquaintance with God is most desirable, but more especially under such a dark and afflictive dispensation as that which Job at this time experienced. That we may invite you all to seek it, we propose to show,

I. Wherein a genuine acquaintance with God consists.

There is a knowledge of God which may be obtained from the works of creation; but this must of necessity be extremely partial and defective. They display his wisdom, and power, and goodness; but they exhibit no traces of that perfection which we so greatly need to be acquainted with, namely, his mercy in pardoning sin. It is from Scripture revelation alone that we can learn his true character as "a just God and a Savior;" and for a discovery of him in that endearing new, we must look at him as exhibited to us in the Gospel of his Son.

It is only in the face of Jesus Christ that all of God's glory shines, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6).

It is only in the cross of Christ that all of God's perfections are made to unite and harmonize. It is there alone that we can see "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissing each other." This then it is which constitutes a true knowledge of God; it is an acquaintance with the great work of redemption; a view of "God in Christ Jesus reconciling sinners unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them".

II. What is that measure of acquaintance with God which we as sinners are privileged to enjoy.

It is not a mere speculative knowledge of these things, but an actual experiencing of them in our own souls; it is not "a hearing of God with our ears, but a seeing of him with our eyes," as Job speaks; I mean, with the eye of faith, which is privileged to "behold Him who is invisible, [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27)." By faith "we have a fellowship," yes a most intimate and endearing fellowship, "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." God will come and manifest himself to us, as our God, our Father, and our Friend, [Genesis 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 5.21). "By his Spirit he will enable us to cry, Abba, Father!" "He will dwell in us, and walk with us;" Christ will live in us, even as his heavenly Father lived in him; insomuch that "he himself will be our life, [John 6:56-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.56-57) with [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4)." What nearer intimacy can be conceived? Yet this it is our privilege to enjoy; this union with him, this committing of our souls to him, this receiving of all needful communications out of his fullness, this living entirely by faith in him as our Savior and our God. This, I say, is that measure of acquaintance with him which we ought to seek, and may actually possess, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20).

III. The benefits resulting from genuine acquaintance with God.

Who can ever fully declare what is implied in peace with God? Truly it is "a peace that passes all understanding." But there is peculiar emphasis in the word "Now," "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace." What was the estimate which Eliphaz had formed of Job's character? He viewed Job as the vilest hypocrite upon earth, and considered him as punished by God with most signal vengeance; yet he said to him, "Now acquaint," now, notwithstanding all your vileness; now, in the midst of all these judgments—even now acquaint yourself with God; and "so shall good come unto you."

This was indeed a just view of God, though an erroneous view of the poor afflicted saint. This is the view we should ever have of God in Christ Jesus; we should see him ready to bestow his richest mercies even on the chief of sinners, and as determined "never to cast out any who come unto him." Be it known then, that, if only we will acquaint ourselves with God as he is revealed to us in the Gospel of his Son, there is not a good which God himself can bestow, which he will not richly grant to us. Nor is there a condition, either of sin or suffering, in which that acquaintance with him shall not be effectual for the restoration of our souls to peace. Were we the vilest of the human race, our iniquities would be blotted out; and were we in a condition a thousand times more deplorable than that of Job, it should turn all our sorrows into joy! [Song of Solomon 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.3).

ADDRESS.

Now acquaint yourselves with God:

1. You who are in a state of sin.

Seek him in reading, meditation, prayer, etc.

2. You who are in a state of suffering.

Doubt not his willingness or sufficiency.

#474

THE UPRIGHT PERSON'S COMFORT UNDER AFFLICTIONS

**[Job 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.10)**

"He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold!"

The superior happiness of the godly above that of the ungodly is not so manifest in a season of prosperity, as under circumstances of deep affliction. The world can rejoice in their portion as long as their pleasures are uninterrupted by bitter reflections or painful dispensations; but in trouble they have no refuge.

The righteous, on the contrary, have less of thoughtless gaiety; but in time of trouble they find abundant consolations. No man was ever beset with a greater complication of trials than Job; all of which were beyond measure heightened by the uncharitable censures of his friends; but still he found an inward support by reflecting upon:

I. His conscious integrity.

It is characteristic of God's children, that they are all upright before God.

As there is a very considerable difference in the attainments of different men with respect to bodily strength and intellectual powers, notwithstanding all possess the same members and enjoy the same faculties—so is there with respect to piety also, notwithstanding all are upright in heart. From the very instant that a person is converted to God, he must of necessity hate sin, and long after a conformity to God's image. He cannot continue to practice sin, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9). He must be, according to the measure of grace given him, "an Israelite indeed, and without allowed deceit."

Nor does humility require us to confess ourselves as hypocrites (willful hypocrites, I mean) when God has quickened us by his Spirit; for it is not humility, but ingratitude and falsehood, to deny the work which God has wrought in us. Many of God's most eminent saints have spoken of their own integrity and rejoiced in it, and even pleaded it before God, [Psalm 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.2). [2 Kings 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.3). And we also, by "proving every one of us our own work, may have rejoicing in ourselves, and not in another, [Galatians 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.4)."

A consciousness of their own integrity is a rich source of consolation to them in a trying hour.

There are times and seasons when almost all the other springs of comfort seem dried up; sometimes it may be painful even to reflect upon God, [Psalm 77:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.3). Job acknowledges in the context, that God's "presence was a trouble to him;" but knowing that God was acquainted with his heart, he could yet appeal to him respecting his own integrity; and from this source he derived a pleasing satisfaction, an encouraging hope. Paul, under a daily and hourly expectation of martyrdom, experienced much joy in the same thought, [2 Corinthians 1:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.8-12). Just so, we find it a great consolation to us, under any trials we may be called to endure.

But Job found a yet further consolation in reflecting upon:

II. The expected outcome of his trials.

Though Job was presently in as hot a furnace as he could possibly endure—he yet believed that he was put into it by a skillful Refiner, for the purifying of his soul from dross.

Those who are truly godly, learn to view the hand of God both in their comforts and their troubles. They know that affliction does not come by chance, but from the hand of Him who directs everything with consummate wisdom.

The ungodly look no further than to second causes; and therefore yield to murmuring and impatience whenever they receive harm from the hand of their fellow-creatures. But the godly are persuaded that their portion, whatever it is, is mixed for them by God himself, and that it is intended "to purge away their iniquity," that they may be partakers of his holiness, [Psalm 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.9). [Isaiah 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.9). [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10). This was evidently the view which Job had of troubles, notwithstanding they sprang from such various sources. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)

An expectation of the benefits of affliction, reconciled Job to the means used for his good.

No one can love trouble on its own account; since it is "never joyous, but grievous." But holiness is the highest wish of the godly soul; it is regarded as a pearl that cannot be purchased at too high a price. Trials, however painful, are welcomed, if they may but be the means of promoting this blessed end. Many have even dreaded the removal of them, lest with them they should lose also the benefits flowing from them.

If we could have viewed the afflictions of Job in their true light, we should have preferred his condition when upon the dunghill far before that of his censorious friends. He was enabled to look forward to the end; and the outcome fully justified his expectations.

Address,

1. Those who are in the furnace of affliction.

Look above all second causes, and see God appointing the nature, measure, and duration of all your trials! "He brings the third part through the fire;" and appoints tribulation as your way to the kingdom. Let him accomplish his own will in his own way; and "what you know not now, you shall know hereafter."

2. Those who have been delivered from their troubles.

When you were bowed down under the load of your afflictions, you probably thought how differently you would live if God should hear your prayers, and deliver you. Now then remember the vows that are upon you, [Psalm 66:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.10-15); [Psalm 116:1-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.1-14). Do not provoke him to visit you with yet heavier afflictions. As clouds succeed the rain, so do troubles come in succession while we are in this valley of tears. Endeavor then so to improve the past, that future troubles may find you better prepared for their reception, and every dispensation fit you for your eternal rest.

3. Those who have never yet experienced any particular trials.

A little outward religion will satisfy you in a state of ease and prosperity. But that will not be found sufficient in a time of trouble. The fire will try what your attainments are. Now therefore be in earnest about the work of salvation, that when affliction comes, it may be mitigated by the consolations of an upright mind, and not be aggravated by the accusations of a guilty conscience.

#475

JOB'S LOVE TO THE WORD OF GOD

**[Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12)**

"I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food!"

Whence arose this remarkable assertion? Was it a spontaneous and uncalled-for effusion of self-applause? Or was it drawn forth by the circumstances in which this holy man was placed? If we look back to the preceding chapter, we find that Eliphaz had given him this counsel, "Acquaint yourself with God, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto you. Receive, I beg you, the law from his mouth, and lay up his Words in your heart, [Job 22:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.21-22)." In answer to this, Job replies, "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he works, but I cannot behold him; he hides himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.…My foot has held his steps; his way have I kept, and not declined; neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my necessary food! verse 3, 8-12."

I will call your attention to these latter words:

I. As an honor to Job.

What sacred writings Job possessed, I know not; but certainly he had some, either written or traditionary; and to these he had respect, "treasuring them more than his necessary food."

Job's desire after the Word of God was more **ardent** than for his necessary food.

A man may feel no great appetite for dainties; but for his necessary food he cannot but feel a most intense desire. Hunger and thirst will in time so oppress a man, that he will gladly part with all that he possesses in the world to satisfy their pressing demands.

In the famine that was in Egypt, the whole people of the country sold their lands, yes, their very bodies, to Pharaoh, for a supply of necessary food, [Genesis 47:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 47.19). Yes, on some occasions, women have eaten their own children, to satisfy the calls of nature. Yet was Job's desire after the words of God more urgent than any pressure of the natural appetite for bodily food!

Job's delight in the Word of God was more **satisfying** than his necessary food.

The sacred records are represented to us as "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6)." Yet this, methinks, conveys but a very inadequate idea of the delight which the promises of God afford to a weary heavy-laden soul. Doubtless to one nearly famished with hunger and thirst, the necessary food, however common it may be, is exceeding sweet—but not so sweet as God's Words were to Job; so much more exquisite was the satisfaction which they afforded to his soul than any of which his bodily frame was capable.

Job's refreshment from the Word of God was more **abiding** than his necessary food.

Elijah, after a hearty meal, "went in the strength of his food forty days and forty nights, [1 Kings 19:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.5-8)." And Jonathan, after a day's extreme fatigue, did but taste a little honey, and his strength was renovated in a very extraordinary degree, 1 Samuel 14:29-30. But the strength which God's blessed Word imparted to Job was visible in every part of his life. Truly "it enlightened his eyes," insomuch that his discernment of God's truth was incomparably clearer than that of any of his friends who came to instruct and comfort him; for God himself says of them, that "they had not spoken of him the thing that was right, as his servant Job had, [Job 42:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.7)."

And, as God's blessed Word informed his understanding, so it strengthened him to bear his trials with a degree of confidence and composure never surpassed by mortal man. In immediate connection with my text, he says, "God knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold! [Job 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.10)." And James represents him, in this respect, as the most perfect pattern to the Church in all ages, "You have heard of the patience of Job, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)."

I may add further, his love to the Word of God was that to which we must trace the whole of that obedience which he so feelingly describes, "My foot has held his steps; his ways have I kept, and not declined; neither have I gone back from the commandments of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my necessary food! [Job 23:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.11-12)."

Let me yet further pursue this subject,

II. As a reproach to us.

How much fuller a revelation of God's mind do **we** possess!

Doubtless Job's views, both of himself as a sinner, and of Christ as a Savior, were, in many respects, clear and just, [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21); [Job 19:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.25-27).

But how incomparably richer is that discovery of God's revealed will, which is transmitted to us in the writings of the Old and New Testament! In His Word, God conceals nothing from us which it would be for our advantage to know. All the eternal counsels of God, as displayed in the covenant of grace, are exhibited to our view, together with all the wonders of redeeming love. How highly, then, should God's Word be esteemed by us!

If Job felt such regard for the partial revelations given to him—then what should we feel towards this complete system of divine truth which we are privileged to enjoy?

But how low is the esteem in which God's Word is held by many of us!

Not only is "our necessary food" preferred before it, but every base indulgence! The gratifications of sense which are most sinful, and the acquisition of objects which are most worthless, have a greater preponderance in our minds than "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God."

Let us only look back, and see how faint have been our desires after divine knowledge, and how feeble our endeavors to obtain it. In truth, every vain book has been preferred before the sacred volume! With almost everyone among us, the perusal of a novel or a newspaper would be resorted to, at any time, to occupy a leisure hour, rather than God's blessed Word.

To what is our ignorance of heavenly subjects to be ascribed, but to this? And to what else must our disobedience to God's commandments be traced? We do not treasure God's Word, and therefore we do not study it. We do not explore its contents, and therefore we neither know it nor obey it. Though it ought to be our meditation and delight all the day, [Psalm 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.2); [Jeremiah 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.16), with many the sacred volume is scarcely ever read at all; and with those who do occasionally take it into their hands, it is read only in a superficial manner, and without that veneration and love which it deserves. I say, then, that Job may well rise up in judgment against us, to condemn us for our grievous neglect of that sacred volume, which even "the angels in Heaven desire to look into! [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12)."

APPLICATION.

Redeem, then, the time which you have lost, for the attainment of divine knowledge.

Were the salvation of your soul out of the question, God's blessed Word deserves more attention than any other book; for there is no other book whose contents are so profitable, so instructive, so edifying in every view. But, when the salvation of your soul depends on your obedience to it, what shall I say? Methinks, you should be studying it day and night, in order to obtain all its offered benefits, and to comply with all its most reasonable demands.

In public, when it is opened to you in the ministration of the Gospel, "receive it, not as the word of man, but as the word of the living God."

In your secret chamber study the Word, as it were, upon your knees; and implore from God the teaching of his Holy Spirit, in order that you may be able to comprehend its glorious contents. In a word, treasure the revelation of God as Job treasured it; and then, like Job, shall you have a record on high, that you pleased God, and that you were accepted by him.

#476

REBELLING AGAINST THE LIGHT

**[Job 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 24.13)**

"There are those who rebel against the light, who do not know its ways or stay in its paths."

We cannot understand any part of the Book of Job aright, unless we continually keep in mind the subject in dispute between Job and his friends; they laboring incessantly to convince him, that the judgments with which he was visited were marks of God's indignation against him, on account of some secret wickedness he had practiced; and he endeavoring to prove to them, that God's dealings with men in this world were no proper tests of their character; since even the most abandoned of mankind, in many instances, prospered in this world, and passed through life without any visible marks of God's displeasure. Among people of this character, he mentions "those who rebel against the light;" who form, indeed, a very large portion of the community in every age and in every country under Heaven.

We shall find it profitable to inquire:

I. Who they are that are liable to this charge.

The expression, "rebelling against the light," may be taken both in a literal and a figurative sense. Accordingly, we must comprehend under this description:

1. Those who rebel against the light of **day**.

This, in fact, is the primary import of the expression in my text; for Job himself goes on to illustrate his meaning by the conduct of murderers and adulterers, both of whom shun the light of day, which would expose them to observation, and affect the darkness of night, as more favorable to their pursuits. "There are those who rebel against the light, who do not know its ways or stay in its paths. When daylight is gone, the murderer rises up and kills the poor and needy; in the night he steals forth like a thief. The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, 'No eye will see me,' and he keeps his face concealed. In the dark, men break into houses, but by day they shut themselves in; they want nothing to do with the light! [Job 24:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 24.13-16)."

Hence such people are called "children of the night and of darkness," in opposition to the godly, who are termed "children of the light and of the day, [1 Thessalonians 5:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.5-7);" the one choosing the night as the season for their wicked transactions, and the other the day for their labors which affect the light.

The truth is, that God has given the light of day on purpose that his people may be enabled to serve and honor him in their different vocations; but the people here spoken of discard the light, denying to it their acknowledgment of its superiority, and giving a decided preference to darkness, which alone is suited to such a wicked conduct as they pursue. This is "rebellion against the light," inasmuch as it is a withholding from it those services which the Creator himself has assigned it, and which its peculiar properties demand.

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed! [John 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19-20)."

2. Those who rebel against the light of **conscience**.

Conscience is God's viceregent in the soul of man, and under its direction and government all without exception, are placed. The heathen, who have no written law to regulate their conduct, and are therefore "a law unto themselves," are under the control of this faculty; which either "accuses or excuses them," according as they conduct themselves in accordance with the law of their minds, or as they oppose and violate its dictates, [Romans 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.14-15). Whoever disobeys the motions of conscience is altogether "inexcusable" before God! [Romans 1:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.20-21).

True indeed, many, while following their conscience, sin grievously against God, as Paul did, when he persecuted the followers of Christ. But his sin consisted, not in following the dictates of his conscience, but in not having his conscience better informed. The obeying of the voice of conscience, so long as it is not seared by continual sin, is always right; and to rebel against it is always wrong! And who is there that has not transgressed in this way? Who is there that, having known what was evil, has not committed it; and, having known what was good, has not neglected to perform it? James tells us plainly, that to rebel thus against the light is sin! "To him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin! [James 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 14.17)."

3. Those who rebel against the light of **revelation**.

God has given us "his Word to be a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths;" and he requires that we obey it without reserve. But where does God's Word have its legitimate authority over us? Where does God's Word reign with unrestricted sway? Alas! Among most professing Christians, its influence is very limited; any worldly interest, any carnal gratification, is quite sufficient to overpower it. Not even the Gospel itself, with all the wonders of redeeming love, can operate so as to subject men to its dominion.

See, I beg you, and consider: Who in practice, regards God's Word as their sole rule of life and conduct? Who yields himself to the Gospel, so as to have his soul "cast into it as into a mold," and so as to be "formed by it into the image of God?" Look around the world, and see how few are really in subjection to God's Word. Even where the Gospel is preached in its utmost simplicity, the great mass of those who hear it "rebel against the light," and "walk on still in darkness."

But, not to speak of others, let us consider,

II. How far **we** ourselves are implicated in it.

In order to bring it home to ourselves, let us call to mind particularly:

1. Our indulgence of secret sins!

Let us look at those who are yet in a state of childhood, and see what frequent deviations from truth and honesty are to be found among them; insomuch, that it is almost a miracle if a single individual is found who cannot call to mind some violations of his duty in these respects.

Let us trace our lives up to manhood, and see what each successive year has brought forth; in how many instances we have harbored thoughts which we could not have dared to express in words! Yes, and uttered in words, to a fellow-creature, what we should not have dared to utter in the hearing of a man of God. Yes, perhaps I may say, have carried also into effect, when, if a pious friend had been present, it would have been impossible for us to have acted as we did.

As for God's presence, we thought nothing of it. It was sufficient for us that we were not seen by man. If we have had reason to fear that our sin was discovered by others, we would have been filled with shame and sorrow. But, if we have eluded human observation, we have thought little of the eye of God! In a word, to a sense of our own honor and credit in the world we have been all alive; but, to the approbation of God we have been totally indifferent!

In speaking on this subject, I may fitly mention the artifices of trade and commerce, which, in fact, constitute the great art of rising in the world, and without which it is scarcely possible for a man to gain a livelihood. Yet, all these arts of adulteration and deceit are practiced in secret, without any regard to God or conscience! I wish all of you, brethren, from the oldest to the youngest, in whatever rank you move, and whatever office in life you fill, to examine whether the sins incident to your age and station are not indulged by you, so far as the habits of the world will sanction them, without any fear of God! Truly, there is not one among us, who, if he will allow conscience to speak the truth, must not acknowledge, that he has "rebelled against the light" in instances without number; yes, and it is to be feared, in instances too which he could not endure to have published to the world at large!

2. Our neglect of acknowledged duties.

Who that has ever heard the Gospel, does not know the two great leading requirements of it; namely, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?" Yet, who complies with them?

Who calls God's ways to remembrance, and mourns over all the evils of his former life, and humbles himself before God in dust and ashes?

Who goes to God from day to day, imploring mercy at his hands in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and wrestling with him, as it were, in prayer, until he obtains an answer of peace?

Who "lives altogether by faith in the Lord Jesus," "receiving out of his fullness those supplies of grace and strength which are necessary for him, and goes forth in dependence upon Christ to glorify his God in all holy obedience?

Alas! alas! we acknowledge readily enough what the light of the Gospel requires; but we "rebel against it." And this, as our Lord says, is the very point which so greatly offends our God! "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil! [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19)."

In fact, it is this which renders men so averse to be told in private what they are accustomed to hear in public, "for everyone that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved; whereas, he who does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God, [John 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.20-21)." Let us, then, only look at the daily habit of our minds, in relation to these things, and we shall see how deeply we all, without exception, are implicated in the guilt which is imputed to those who rebel against the light.

Behold, then:

1. How amazing has been the forbearance of God towards us!

God has seen all our wickedness, however secret, whether it has been in a way of commission, or of omission. "The darkness has been no darkness with him; but the night and the day to him are both alike." How astonishing then it is that he has borne with us, and not taken us away in the midst of our sins! How astonishing God's patience, if I may so say, that He might have cut us off in our rebellion, and made us eternal monuments of his righteous wrath! How astonishing too, that when he has seen the whole world, and all the iniquity that has been perpetrated in it, he has borne with us so long, and not consumed us utterly, as Sodom and Gomorrah!

Let us, then, acknowledge "this patience of God to be salvation, [2 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.15);" and let it convince us that he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live! [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9)."

2. What a mercy it is that gospel light is yet continued to us!

From many churches, God has removed the lampstand when those who enjoyed the light persisted in rebellion against it. But we, brethren, have the light continued to us:  
the light of day; being preserved in life, when so many others have been taken away long before they attained to our age;  
the light of conscience, too, which so many others have been left to "sear as with a hot iron;"  
and the light of Scripture, which yet sounds in our ears, and invites us to accept of mercy through the Redeemer's blood.

O brethren! How little a while you will have the light with you, God alone knows. "But while you have the light, walk in the light, that you may be the children of light, [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36)." Beg of God that the Word you hear may "not be a savor of death to your death and condemnation, but a savor of life to your eternal life and happiness!"

3. How thankful should we be if conscience has in any measure its proper influence upon us!

Does conscience smite you, brethren? Be not in haste to close the wound! Yes, beg of God that it may never be healed, but by the blood of Jesus Christ. Conviction is the very first work of the Spirit of God; and the deeper that is, the richer will be your consolations!

And when you have obtained peace with God, still let conscience sit enthroned in your soul, to regulate your every act, and every word, and every thought, according to the mind and will of God as revealed in His Word. Entreat of God to make your conscience as tender as the apple of your eye. And, if but a speck of sin ever enters your eye—then let it never rest there, but weep it out with tears of penitential sorrow, and have the guilt of it also washed away in the blood of Christ!

In a word, endeavor to "walk in the light, as God is in the light; and then shall God and you have fellowship one with the other; and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, shall cleanse you from all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)."

#477

THE CONSCIENCE

**[Job 27:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.6)**

"My conscience shall not reproach me as long as I live."

Job had been represented by God as a perfect and upright man; and the severe trials he was called to endure served only to prove the truth of that assertion. True it is that he was occasionally driven by the unkindness of his friends and the depth of his sufferings to speak without due reverence for the Supreme Being; but never were the predictions of Satan, or the accusations of his own friends, verified respecting him. His whole life had been a continued course of piety and virtue; and he determined, through grace, that nothing should divert him from it. Being conscious that he had maintained his integrity hitherto before God, he would not allow his uncharitable friends to rob him of the comfort which that consciousness afforded him in this hour of trial, "he held fast his righteousness, and would not let it go." And being determined to preserve the same blessed course even to the end, he said, "My conscience shall not reproach me so long as I live."

Of all the blessings that man can enjoy in this life, there is none greater than the testimony of a good conscience; without it, not all the world can make us happy; and with it, we find support under all the calamities that can come upon us. Let us then consider,

I. The proper office of conscience.

While we acknowledge that there are no innate ideas which obtain universally among the children of men, we affirm that there is in every man an innate capacity to judge of, yes, and an innate power that will sit in judgment upon his actions, and will pronounce a sentence of condemnation or acquittal upon him, according as he obeys or violates the law, by which he conceives himself bound to regulate his life. To this effect Paul, speaking of the Gentiles, says, that they, not having the written law, are a law unto themselves; and that their conscience accuses or excuses them, according as they conduct themselves in reference to that law, [Romans 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.15).

From hence we see that the office of conscience is two-fold:

1. The first the office of conscience is to **judge of what is past**.

God, who will pass judgment upon all men at the last day, has appointed conscience to be, as it were, his viceregent in the hearts of men, and to testify to them beforehand what sentence they are to expect at his tribunal; nor is it of actions only that conscience is constituted a judge, but of dispositions, of motives, and of all the most secret workings of the heart. If evil is committed by us in act, word, or thought—it is to condemn us, even though the whole world should resound with our praise. On the other hand, conscience is to bear testimony in our favor, and to acquit us, if we are innocent, even though men and devils should combine to load us with reproach.

The office of conscience, as an accuser, is strikingly exhibited in those who brought to our Lord the woman caught in adultery; when he bade the person who was without sin among them to cast the first stone at her, they all went out successively "from the eldest to the last," every one of them standing condemned in his own mind! [John 8:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.7-9). We are not necessarily to conclude that they had all been guilty of the same particular sin; but that every one of them had some grievous sin brought to his remembrance, by which he was convinced that he himself was not a fit person to use severity towards her. Our Lord did not lay any specific sin to their charge; nor were the spectators able to accuse them; but conscience did its office; and they were unable to withstand its potent sway.

Many glorious instances also are recorded of the power of conscience to support the mind under the severest trials. The very instance of Job which we are now considering, evinces this; and the solemn appeals which David, and Paul, and others, have made to God himself respecting their integrity—prove, beyond a doubt, that the testimony of a good conscience will enable a man to rejoice, though suffering under the foulest aspersions and the most unfounded accusations! 2 Samuel 23:21-25. [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12); [2 Corinthians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.17-18); [2 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.23); [Acts 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.1); [Romans 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-2).

2. The second office of conscience is to **direct in what is to come**.

Every man is bound to be regulated by his own conscience. We may sin indeed, and sin grievously, while following the dictates of our conscience; but our sin will not consist in doing what we think to be right; but in not taking care to have our conscience better informed. Even supposing any line of conduct to be right in itself, we ought not to do it, unless we believe it to be right; for "whatever is not of faith is sin, [Romans 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.23)." We ought to be "thoroughly persuaded in our own minds, [Romans 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.5)." If we doubt respecting the proper line of duty, we should wait, and inquire, and pray, until we see our way clear; especially if the doubt has respect to the morality of the action, [Romans 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.22). There may be doubts about some particular circumstances which can never be fully resolved; and in them we must follow the line which expediency prescribes; but where duty can by any means be ascertained, then we should exert ourselves to the uttermost to learn the will of God, and then follow the path which we apprehend he will most approve.

But, that we may mark more distinctly the office of conscience in relation to this point, we shall proceed to notice,

II. Our duty with respect to conscience.

While conscience is given to us to preserve us from all moral evil, we are bound on our part to preserve it in a lively and vigorous state.

1. It is our duty to consult the records of conscience.

Unobserved by us, conscience notices from time to time the quality of our actions, and frequently assigns to them a very different character from that which a common observer would imagine them to bear. But if we forbear to consult its records, they become gradually fainter, until they are almost wholly effaced. Scarcely an hour, and certainly not a day, should ever pass, without our retiring, as it were, to converse with our conscience.

Conscience, what have you recorded concerning me this day?

Conscience, what is your testimony respecting my morning prayers at the throne of grace?

Were my prayers such as became a poor sinful creature, redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, and altogether dependent on the operations of his grace?

Were my prayers full of gratitude for mercies received, of contrition for sins committed, and of affiance in him as a promise-keeping God?

Conscience, what of my tempers throughout the day?

Conscience, what of the improvement of my time for God?

Conscience, what of my zeal for his honor?

Conscience, what of my labors for the eternal welfare of my fellow-creatures?

Thus, as the Apostle says, "We should examine ourselves," and "test our own selves;" nay more, we should beg of God to search and test, not our ways only, but our inmost thoughts and desires—so that we may have a fuller knowledge of ourselves, and keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and man.

2. It is our duty to revere the testimony of conscience.

If we disregard the voice of conscience, we may soon silence it altogether, yes, we may even "sear it" as with a hot iron, so as to make it "past feeling! [1 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.2)." We must remember whose voice it is, even the voice of God himself, speaking in our hearts. Were God to speak by an audible voice from Heaven, we would hear and tremble; the fear of his Majesty would alarm us. But his Majesty is the same, whether he speaks in thunders and in earthquakes, or in a still small voice; and he should be listened to with the same reverence in the one case, as in the other. It is his testimony respecting us; and agreeably to that we should estimate both our character and our prospects. "If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things; but, if our heart does not condemn us, then have we confidence towards God, [1 John 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.20-21)."

3. It is our duty to obey the dictates of conscience.

Nothing can justify a violation of the commands of conscience. Whatever conscience prescribes, we should do it without hesitation and without delay! Nothing should intimidate us, nothing deter us; we should not count our lives dear in comparison with its testimony in our favor. Like the Hebrew youths, we should be resolute, though threatened with all the sufferings that tyrannic cruelty can inflict.

Here it may be useful to observe, that the first testimony of conscience is generally the most just, and most to be depended on. We may by reasonings bewilder conscience, so that it shall not know what testimony to give; or we may by leaning to the side of our passions or our interests, bias it to give a directly contrary testimony to that which it first suggested. It is therefore of peculiar importance to bear in mind our first impressions; for though they may not be always right, and may be corrected by the acquisition of further light and knowledge—yet they may be always considered as more pure and unadulterated, and therefore as deserving of more peculiar attention.

4. It is our duty to get conscience enlightened and rectified by the study of Scripture.

This, though mentioned last, must be attended to in the first place. If we navigate the seas with a compass, we must take care that that compass be true to the pole, and not be under any undue influence to impede its motions. If it is drawn aside by a magnet, it will, instead of assisting us in our voyage, infallibly drive us on rocks and quicksands. Thus Paul could say, that he had lived "in all good conscience" from his youth up; but, being blinded by his prejudices, and "thinking he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus," he was for a long time a most determined enemy of Christ and his Church. Afterwards, when he was enlightened and renewed by the Spirit of God, he changed his course, and became as zealous for Christ as ever he had been against him.

No pains therefore should be esteemed too great for the acquiring of divine knowledge; we should study the Holy Scriptures with all diligence; we should cry mightily to God for the influences of his Spirit to guide us into all truth; and we should keep our minds open to conviction upon all points that will admit of doubt. Especially we should entreat of God to give us a single eye; for, "if our eye is single—then our whole body will be full of light; but if our eye is evil—then our whole body will be full of darkness; and, if the light that is in us is darkness—then how great is that darkness!"

We cannot better improve this subject than by suggesting to you some beneficial **cautions**.

1. Guard against an **evil** and **guilty** conscience.

Many continue all their days impenitent, while yet they know that they are guilty before God; O let none of you rest satisfied with such a state as this. If sin is not repented of, and washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ, it will abide upon your souls to all eternity!

Will any of you continue in a state of guilt and condemnation, when God is ready to wash you in "the fountain that was opened for sin and for impurity! Compare [Zechariah 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.1) with [John 5:2-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.2-9)." Know assuredly that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" and that, being once cleansed in it, you shall "have no more conscience of sin," so as to be under any distressing apprehensions on account of it, [Hebrews 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.2); since, while it "purges you from an evil conscience, it will stimulate you to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9); [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14)."

2. Guard against a **partial** and **deluded** conscience.

It is surprising how partial the consciences of many are. They can see no evil at all in some things which suit their inclination, while they are shocked at the very mention of other things which are in themselves altogether indifferent, "they strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel!" The Pharisees would not for the world eat with unwashed hands; but they would devour widows' houses without a moment's hesitation; they would bribe a man to betray his Lord; but, on the restoration of the money, they would on no account put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood.

Thus it is at this day with people of every description. We should be glad if we could say that all religious professors were exempted from the charge; but there are many even of them who would account it a heinous crime to deviate from the rules of their own sect or party, who yet will violate both truth and honesty in their dealings with the world. Such people will say, "My conscience shall not reproach me as long as I live;" but we hope that their consciences will reproach them before it is too late; for, if they continue to harbor any one allowed sin, whether in act or in heart, they are no better than self-deceiving hypocrites; and their religion will be found vain at last! [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27)."

3. Guard against an **over-confident** and **unfeeling**conscience.

Though a over-scrupulous conscience is an evil to be lamented—yet a tender conscience is above all things to be desired; it should be kept tender, even as the apple of our eye. The smallest deviation from our duty, either to God or man, ought to pain us in our inmost souls. How lovely was the spirit of David, when his heart smote him for cutting off the skirt of Saul's garment, when, in the judgment of the world at large, he would have been justified in putting his malignant and implacable enemy to death.

Thus should it be with us; if only a thought of our heart is in any respect contrary to God's mind and will, we should be humbled in the dust; and our incessant labor should be, "to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God;" or, in other words, to be "holy as God is holy," and "perfect even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

#478

SPIRITUAL DECLENSION

**[Job 29:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.2-3)**

"Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God watched over me; when His lamp shone upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness."

To take a retrospect of our past lives is always profitable; but it is frequently attended with much pain. The man that has lived without God in the world, how can he look back upon the days that are past, without feeling the deepest anguish of mind? Nor is a review of former days less distressing to one who from a life of spiritual peace and joy, has fallen into a state of darkness and of spiritual declension.

The change which Job had experienced, was both outward, in all that related to the body; and inward, in what related to his soul. The circumstances attendant on that change were so peculiar, that they are but little applicable to the church at large. Just so, the design of God in them was also very peculiar; it being not so much to punish the sin which yet remained in his servant, as to display, confirm, and augment the grace that had been imparted to him. Into these peculiarities we shall not enter; because, though they might instruct and amuse our minds, they would not come home to men's bosoms, or lead us sufficiently to a contemplation of ourselves. Job's temporal calamities we shall altogether overlook; and his spiritual troubles we shall notice only in a general view, as affording occasion for us to take a review of our past lives, and to see whether we have not reason for a similar complaint, "O that I were as in months past!"

There had been a time when, as Job says, "the candle of God had shined upon his head, so that by the light of it he had been enabled to walk through darkness," and when "God himself was with him," and "the secret of God was upon his tabernacle."

So it may have been with us; and yet a most painful reverse have taken place. And so important do I conceive this subject to be, that I shall endeavor to cast upon it what light I can in the compass of one short discourse.

A person anxious to know the state of his soul before God, would be ready to ask: What are the usual causes and precursors of spiritual declension? Whereby shall I ascertain whether it has taken place in me? And how, if such a change has taken place, shall I regain my former happy condition? To answer these questions, I will proceed, in a brief and partial manner—to point out the sources, the evidences, and the remedies of spiritual declension.

I. The **sources** of spiritual declension.

It is obvious that, were we to attempt a full discussion of the subject, a whole volume would scarcely suffice for the consideration of it. We must therefore of necessity confine ourselves to a few leading topics, leaving a multitude of others, of nearly equal importance, untouched.

1. The first source of spiritual declension is **a remissness in secret devotional duties**.

The duties of the closet, such as reading, and meditation, and prayer, are indispensably necessary to the welfare of the soul. As well might we hope that our bodies should retain their vigor without food and exercise, as that our souls should flourish without communion with God. The vegetable creation will not thrive without light; nor will the seed of divine grace, which has been sown in our hearts, grow without the light of God's countenance.

But divine grace will not return if it is unsought, like the light of day; it must be sought, and sought with care too, or else it will be withheld, and the soul will be left to languish in darkness and distress. And in this respect is that word of our Savior verified, "To him who has, shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has shall be taken away, [Matthew 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.12)."

2. The second source of spiritual declension is **an indulgence of some secret lust**.

Sin, of whatever kind it is, is "a worm at the root," which will soon make the fairest gourd in the universe to wither. It matters not what the sin is—it may be pride, or envy, or malice, or revenge, or lust, or covetousness, or discontent, or sloth, or unbelief, or vain conceit, or any other sin. Every man has some "sin which more easily besets him;" and that, whatever it may be, will grieve the Spirit of God, and provoke God to hide his face from us!

"Sin of any kind will separate between him and us," and deprive us of all his gracious communications, "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me." And our blessed Lord tells us, that "a right hand, or a right eye," not sacrificed and abandoned—will plunge us, both body and soul, "into Hell-fire! [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48)." It is no wonder then, that any man declines in spiritual health, while some unsubdued sin lurks within him, and, "like a canker, eats up" all his strength! [2 Timothy 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.17).

3. The third source of spiritual declension is **an undue and unnecessary entangling of ourselves in worldly affairs.**

All have of necessity some worldly engagements, which it is their bounden duty diligently to perform. And many have a very great portion of their time necessarily occupied with worldly pursuits; nor are they at liberty to withdraw from a post which, though painful and difficult, God has evidently assigned them.

But when we needlessly multiply our temporal concerns, we must expect to suffer loss in those which are spiritual. Our Savior, in the parable of the sower, tells us, that the cause of vast multitudes not bringing forth fruit to perfection is that "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word that has been sown in their hearts, and render it unfruitful."

A man who "loads his feet with thick clay," or allows a long garment to impede the motion of his feet, does not wonder that he makes an inadequate progress in a race. Just so, it can be little wondered at if a person, encumbered, unnecessarily or beyond a due proportion, with the cares or pleasures or entertainments of this life, declines in the ways of God.

Supposing a spiritual declension to have taken place in us, what may we expect to be:

II. The **evidences** of spiritual declension.

Spiritual decay will surely discover itself in every exercise of the soul, even as bodily weakness does in every function of the body. But, to instance it in two or three particulars. We may be sure that a declension has taken place:

1. We are in spiritual decline, if we have suffered loss **in the spirituality of our minds and desires**.

In a soul that is in full health, there is a tendency upwards, not unlike that of a vessel or balloon, filled with light and buoyant air. It is fastened, as it were, by cords to the earth; but it discovers its proper tendency by repeated and continued efforts to ascend; and, as different cords are loosened, its efforts are more and more visible; and, when the last cord is cut asunder, it mounts to the heavens, as the regions it most desires.

Just so, the soul in proportion as it is "filled with the Spirit," aspires heavenward. But, if the vessel before referred to loses its buoyant powers, it ceases its flight, and descends upon the earth; and from the effect, no one is at a loss to infer the cause.

I will grant, that a pressure of worldly engagements may operate unfavorably in appearance, while there is no cause for self-condemnation in reality. The way to form an accurate judgment is, not so much to inquire: Whether the flights of the soul heavenward are less frequent than they were under different circumstances? But: What the tendencies of the soul are, when it is left at liberty to pursue the course it most desires? And, if in these seasons it evinces a heaviness and an indisposition to ascend, then may it be clearly seen, that the soul has suffered loss; and in proportion as it ceases to abide in God by faith and love—God will cease to dwell in it by the vital energies of his Spirit; and then "its root will soon be as rottenness; and its blossom will go up as dust! [Isaiah 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.24)."

2. We are in spiritual decline, if we have suffered loss **in the tenderness of our conscience**.

The effect of grace is:  
to make the conscience as tender as the apple (pupil) of the eye;  
to make us dread sin,  
to make us flee temptation, and  
to make us use all possible means for the preserving of the soul pure before God.

In one who is walking close with God, even a speck of sin in the spiritual eye will not be allowed to willingly retain the place it has invaded; but will be wept out with tears of penitence and shame! But, if the conscience has lost its sensibility, so that it can now endure without emotion a feeling which would once have filled it with the acutest anguish—then what shall we say? Can that soul be in a flourishing condition?

We must distinguish surely between an over-scrupulous and a tender conscience; for increasing spiritual light may have lessened its scrupulosity about indifferent matters, while yet its tenderness is undiminished in reference to every acknowledged duty. But, if the smaller commissions of sin or neglects of duty pass with less grief and indignation against them than formerly, the authority of God is weakened in the soul, the hatred of sin diminished; and, if a remedy is not speedily applied, "the last state of that soul will be worse than its beginning!"

3. We are in spiritual decline, if we have suffered loss **in the vigor of our exertions for God**.

A man that is right with God will always be saying, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?" No labor will be grudged, no sacrifice will be accounted too great—if only God may be glorified in him. But if the self-denial which once appeared unworthy of a thought is now become a burden, and the efforts which once we made in the service of our God are now relaxed—then we obviously have declined in real piety. Were we right, we should never think we had attained anything as long as anything was left to be attained, or done anything as long as anything was left to be done; but, forgetting what was behind, we would reach forward to that which was before; and our grief would be, that we could not do a thousand times more for Him who has done and suffered so much for us. If we are faint and weary in well-doing, then it is plain and indisputable that our spiritual health has declined.

Such backslidings however are not incurable, if only we apply, according to God's prescription:

III. The **remedies** for spiritual declension.

1. We may regain our former state **by a renewed and more solemn repentance**.

This is the remedy prescribed by our Lord himself to the angel of the Church of Ephesus, when it "had left his first love." "Remember from whence you have fallen, and repent, and do your first works! [Revelation 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4-5)."

Just so, we must look back and search out the occasions of our departure from God; we must then examine the instances wherein our departure has appeared. For those we must abase ourselves before God in dust and ashes; and we must again and again apply to the blood of sprinkling for the remission of them. We must then return to those better ways which we have forsaken, and resolutely give up ourselves with all our powers to the service of our God.

If our grief was deep at our first turning unto God, it ought to be tenfold deeper now, in proportion as our guilt by reason of our backslidings from God is aggravated beyond that which we contracted by our rebellions in the days of our ignorance. We should add fasting also to prayer. If, as our Lord says, "The days come when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them; and then shall they fast;" how much more ought we to fast, when by our own unfaithfulness we have driven the Bridegroom from us!

We need only mark the neglect into which this duty of sincere repentance has fallen, in order to see how low the standard of religion is, which is current in the world. But, if we would recover the peace and purity that we have lost, we must return unto God with the deepest contrition, and wash from our guilt in the fountain opened for sin and for impurity.

2. We may regain our former state **by getting a sense of redeeming love into the soul**.

Without this, repentance will be of little avail. Repentance will prepare the soul; but it is a sight of Christ alone that will perfect it. Repentance will cast us down; but love to Christ will raise us up. There is nothing that will effectually constrain the soul, but a sense of the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart. That regained, all else will be easy. And that is to be regained, not by slavish exertions, but by the simple exercise of faith.

As in the first instance we come to him, not seeking to heal ourselves first, and then applying to him as the Physician, but by a simple dependence on his sin-atoning death and righteousness; so we must do at all times and under all circumstances, trusting in him only as "our Righteousness and strength." This reliance on his promises will alone cleanse us; and this view of his glory will alone change us into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God.

3. We may regain our former state **by keeping the nearness of eternity in view**.

This also is prescribed by our blessed Lord, as the means of augmented watchfulness, and of a more entire preparation for death and judgment. We know not at what hour our Lord will come. For anything that we know to the contrary, this very night our souls may be required of us! Now, if we bore this in mind, should we rest in a cold or lukewarm state? Should we not endeavor to have our loins girded and our lamps trimmed, and ourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord? Could we but, like the Apostle, learn to "die daily," we should make no account either of labors or of sufferings, "if by any means we might attain unto the resurrection of the dead! [Philippians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.10-11)."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are conscious that they are in a state of spiritual declension.

Truly, brethren, it is a painful thing to look back upon times and seasons, when, in comparison with the present, you had the enjoyment of God in your souls. What self-reproach do you feel in the retrospect, and what misgivings in the prospect of the eternity that awaits you! We are told that people in your situation have "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27)."

Be thankful, however, that it is not yet too late to regain your former peace; yes, you may have it yet increased and multiplied a hundred-fold. God has indeed said, that "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways, [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.14);" but he has also said, "Return unto me, you backsliding children; and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely; and my anger shall be turned away from you! [Jeremiah 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.22). [Hosea 14:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.1-2); [Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4)." Return then in dependence on his promised mercy; then shall it be with you as in the months that are past; yes, and your last days shall be your best.

2. Those who are making progress in the divine life.

Thrice happy souls! "To you to live is Christ; and to die it shall be gain!" How sweet is it to have the testimony of our conscience that we are living near to God, and walking daily in the light of his countenance! This is the way to be truly happy. This is the way to secure peace in a dying hour. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace!" Go on then; but not in your own strength, nor with unhallowed confidence. "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." Yet let not this consideration fill you with slavish fear, but only make you watchful and dependent on God. God is able to keep you; and he will keep the feet of his saints; and, if only you commit your way entirely to him—then he will "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."

"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever! Amen Jude verse 24, 25."

#479

JOB'S CHARACTER

**[Job 29:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.11-16)**

"Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger."

To boast of one's own goodness is a sure mark of vanity and folly! It is a mark of *vanity*, because it betrays an undue desire of man's applause! It is a mark of *folly*, because it defeats its own end, and injures the reputation which it is intended to exalt.

Nevertheless there are occasions on which we may, without any impropriety, declare facts, notwithstanding the mention of them does tend to proclaim our own praise. If, for instance, we have been calumniated, we may vindicate ourselves; and, if false charges have been adduced against us, we may refute them, by a candid and explicit statement of the truth.

It was in this way that Job was led to speak of himself as he does in the passage before us. His friends had not only concluded from his extraordinary sufferings that he must have been peculiarly wicked, but they had undertaken even to specify crimes of which he had been guilty, and for which this afflictive dispensation had been sent, [Job 22:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.5-10). It was in answer to these unfounded charges that he delivered, what appears like an eulogy upon himself, but what was indeed nothing more than an appeal to facts for the establishment of his own innocence.

To us it is a singular benefit that such a statement was ever made; because it shows us, not only what our character ought to be, but what has actually been attained.

In order to make a suitable improvement of the passage, we propose to show:

I. The excellence of this character.

From the particulars which are here enumerated we may distinctly notice:

1. Job's character itself.

The first thing that attracts our notice is, Job's diffusive benevolence. Misery, wherever it could be found, was the object of his tender compassion and assiduous regard; and the greater that misery was, the more imperious did he consider his call to relieve it. Were they poor, or blind, or lame, or widows, or fatherless, or friendless—he felt as a father towards them, and labored to supply their every need. In the exercise of that benevolence he showed the most active zeal. He did not stay until his interposition was sought for; but went to the most frequented parts of the city, and "prepared his seat in the street, verse 7," in order that all might have me the readiest access to him, and be encouraged to spread their needs before him. Cases of considerable difficulty often occurred; but he spared no pains to inform himself of whatever might throw light upon the question, and to search to the bottom the truth or falsehood of every assertion, the force or nullity of every claim. No labor was accounted great, when it might tend to the relief of trouble or the confirmation of right.

To this he added unblemished integrity. Nothing could for a moment bias his judgment, or induce him to swerve from the path of equity. It sometimes happened that he had to deal with powerful oppressors; but he was unawed by power, as well as unmoved by wealth; yes, the more power he found on the side of injustice, the more determinately he set himself to reduce it within its proper bounds, "he broke the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth;" and the effecting of this he accounted more honorable than any ornaments, either of magisterial robes, or of an imperial diadem, verse 14.

2. The **excellence** of Job's character .

See what was thought of it by all who beheld it in Job, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me." And we ask: Where is the man in the whole universe that must not admire it? What part of it is there that is not worthy of our imitation? That such a character will not be censured, we by no means affirm; but no man will censure benevolence, or zeal, or integrity, as such; they must first put a wrong construction upon it, before they will venture to utter one word against it.

From viewing this character in itself, let us contemplate it in its aspect on society. What incalculable good must not arise from it!

See but a single magistrate possessed of wisdom, of integrity, of power; see him laying out all his time, his strength, his influence in the composing of differences and in the relieving of every species of distress; see him doing this with unselfish zeal and unwearied diligence; will not such a one be esteemed as the "father of the poor?" and will he not "make many a widow's heart to sing for joy?"

See a minister of such a description, devoting himself with equal zeal to the administering of temporal comforts to the poor, and adding a similar attention to their spiritual necessities. To how many will he be made a source of good, becoming "eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame!" Surely in many instances "the blessing of him who was ready to perish" will come on such a minister, and the eyes and ears of multitudes will bear witness to him.

The same is equally true of all that are in private life, according to the extent of their sphere and the steadiness of their exertions. And if once such were to become the general character of society, it would go far to banish evil, moral as well as temporal, from the world.

The excellence of this character being established, we will proceed to mark,

II. The importance of cultivating this character in ourselves, and of encouraging it in others.

1. Of cultivating this character in ourselves.

Were there nothing more than the acquiring of such intrinsic worth, and the being so assimilated to Jesus, "who went about doing good," it would be most desirable that we should be imitators of this holy man.

But a resemblance to Jesus is not merely desirable; it is necessary; for by our conformity to Jesus' character we must judge of our state before God; and by it we shall be judged in the last day.

The highest attainments, whether of knowledge or of faith, are nothing in God's estimation, without an active, constant, self-denying exercise of love! *[1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3)*. This is the test by which we are to try our religion. We are told expressly, "that pure and undefiled religion is, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27);" and that by "bearing one another's burdens we fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)." Without this, our faith is no better than the faith of devils, [James 2:14-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.14-19), and all our professions of love to God are mere hypocrisy.

God himself repeatedly appeals to us on this very subject, as though he were willing to abide by the testimony of our own consciences, [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17); [1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.20). To have any just evidence therefore that we belong to Christ, we must tread in the steps of holy Job. This is the rule prescribed by that loving and beloved disciple John, "My little children, let us love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth; for hereby we know that we are of the truth; and shall assure our hearts before him, [1 John 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-19)." These are "the things that accompany salvation, [Hebrews 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9-10);" and by abounding in them we shall obtain a full assurance of hope, [Hebrews 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.11), and an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord, [2 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.7); [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11).

But these habits are also necessary, because by our proficiency in them we shall be judged in the last day. Who can read the account of the day of judgment as given us by Christ himself, and not wish that he had cultivated more the dispositions of Job? Who that lives for himself, does not see cause to tremble? Let us deeply consider and diligently weigh the declarations of Christ himself, [Matthew 25:31-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.31-46), and we shall need no further arguments to prove the importance of cultivating love.

2. Of encouraging this character in others.

It is thought by many, that it is better to distribute their alms themselves, than to do good through the medium of others. We grant that all may find proper objects of charity within their own immediate neighborhood; and that, if every one would exert himself within his own circle, there would be little comparative need of people to dispense our alms for us. But we know that some lack time, some inclination, some ability—to seek out the poor, and to impart to them spiritual instruction with temporal relief. Though therefore we certainly admit that it is well to reserve a portion of our alms for our own personal distribution—yet we cannot but say that it is of peculiar importance to encourage the activity of others; for by that, more extensive good is done, more grace is called forth into exercise, and more honor is brought to religion.

More extensive good is done. Numberless are the cases wherein the poor require more assistance than it would be possible for an individual to afford them. It is on this account that hospitals and other public charities have been so universally established. For the same reason a society for relieving the poor must be of the greatest utility, because that can be done out of a public fund which cannot be done out of a private purse. Moreover, where people who have some degree of leisure and ability devote themselves to the various offices of charity—it must be supposed that they will acquire a greater fitness for the work, and consequently will perform it to more advantage. Besides, many, however fit for the work, and well disposed towards it, have not time to spare; and consequently much good must be left undone, if those who have time are not encouraged and enabled to improve it in this way.

More grace also is called forth into exercise. We will suppose that in either case the same degree of grace is exercised both by the donor and the receiver of the alms; still the employing of the services of others has greatly the advantage; because it calls forth their graces, and strengthens in them a habit of benevolence. Methinks it is like the training of soldiers for war; which gives them a martial spirit, and renders them more efficient in their work. Many there are, possessed of wisdom and piety, who yet, on account of the narrowness of their own circumstances, are unable to visit the poor; because they cannot show their sympathy in such a way as to render it acceptable to the poor themselves. But, if they are employed as the dispensers of the charity of others, they have scope for all the finer feelings of their souls, and are enabled to "rejoice with those who rejoice, as well as to weep with those who weep."

We may add further, that more honor also is brought to the gospel. It is said by the enemies of the Gospel, that the doctrine of salvation by faith alone leads to a neglect and contempt of good works. But, with Job, we will appeal to facts. Who are they that most abound in good works; those who talk about them, and profess to make them the ground of their hopes? Or those who build all their hopes of salvation on Christ alone? Among which of these two classes shall we find those who, not having funds of their own, are willing to become the almoners of others, that they may exert themselves with more effect in every office of love both to the bodies and the souls of men? The matter is too notorious to admit a doubt. And does not this tend to the honor of religion? and do not they consult the interests of religion, who encourage such societies? Yes; and our answer to all who decry our faith is, "Outdo us in good works!"

#480

THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

**[Job 30:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 30.23)**

"I know that you will bring me down to death, and to the house appointed for all living!"

We cannot certainly know the ultimate intentions of Providence from anything we either see or feel. A man to whom God has given a robust constitution, cannot therefore be sure that he shall attain to old age; nor can a man that is bowed down with complicated diseases, be certain that his health shall not be restored. Presumption too often attends to the former state, and despair attends to the latter; as appears in the instance of Job.

In his prosperity he said, "I shall die in my nest!" without living to experience any material trials; and in his adversity he felt confident that God, whom now he thought was his enemy, was bringing him down to the grave; and that his present troubles would terminate in death.

In both of these opinions he was mistaken; he did experience very heavy afflictions; and those were followed by brighter days of happiness than ever he had before known. But though he erred as to the expectations he had formed respecting the time and manner of his death, his general assertion was founded in truth, and conveys to us a most instructive lesson. Let us consider,

I. The truth affirmed.

Nothing can be more certain than that we shall all die.

The grave is "the house appointed for all living." Adam was doomed to it for his transgression, [Genesis 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.17); [Genesis 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.19), and all his posterity have been involved in his sentence, [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12). It is not in the power of wisdom, or strength, or riches, to avert the stroke of death, [Psalm 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.10), [11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Psalm 49.11). All, whatever be their rank or condition, must pay the debt of nature, [Ecclesiastes 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 8.8). Whether we have lived in a palace or a cottage, the grave is the house in which we must all abide at last. The righteous are, in this respect, on a par with the wicked, [Romans 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.10). [Zechariah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 1.5). The moment that God says to any, "Your soul is required of you!" "his body must return to its native dust, and his spirit must return unto Him who gave it, [Ecclesiastes 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.7)."

The certainty of death is a truth universally acknowledged.

Every one "knows" that he himself must die. We look back to the antediluvian world; and though we find that they lived eight or nine hundred years, they all died at last. Since that time, successive generations have come and passed away. Our own near ancestors are removed, and "their places know them no more." There are few among us who have not, within a very few years, lost some friend or relative. And we all feel, that if we have not any grave illness at present, we are at least liable to those diseases and decays which are daily weakening the strongest constitutions, and executing the Divine appointments in bringing us to the grave.

The **time** of our death, as we observed before, is known to none; but the **certainty** of death is not for one moment doubted by any! "For the living know that they will die!" [Ecclesiastes 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.5).

As this subject is so plain, we hasten to,

II. The improvement we should make of the certainty of death.

1. The certainty of death should moderate our regards to the things of this world.

Were our present possessions to abide with us forever, there were some reason for our eagerness respecting them; but, as they are so soon to be removed from us, or we from them, it is folly to let them occupy so large a portion of our affections.

We are not greatly elated with the comforts of an inn, where we are to stop but an hour; nor are we greatly depressed with any lack of comforts which we may find there; the thought of our stay there being so short, renders us comparatively indifferent to our present accommodations.

Thus the thought, that "the Lord is at hand," should cause us to make "our moderation known unto all men, [Philippians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.5)." This is elsewhere enforced by the Apostle in relation to everything, whether pleasant or painful. All is but a pageant passing by; and whether the spectacle is mournful or joyous, it is scarcely sooner arrived that it vanishes from before our eyes, [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31). Our joys and our sorrows will both appear light and momentary, when viewed in reference to the transitoriness of what is visible, and the endless duration of the things invisible! [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18).

2. The certainty of death should make us diligent in preparing for the eternal world.

The time allotted us here, is given on purpose that we may prepare for another and a better state. If the present hour is not seized—then all opportunity of securing happiness in another world will be lost! Should not this thought stimulate us to activity in the concerns of our souls? Solomon was clearly of this opinion, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10); and so must every one, who reflects a moment on the comparative importance of time and eternity.

If we could return to earth after having once departed; or begin in the invisible world the work which we have neglected here—then we might have some excuse. But to know that death and the grave are ready to swallow us up, and yet to trifle with the interests of the soul, which, if neglected now, are gone forever—this, I say, is a madness, which credulity itself could never imagine to exist, if its existence were not daily and hourly before our eyes!

The prayer of Moses is that which reason dictates, and which God approves, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom, [Psalm 90:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.12)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who understand the certainty of death, and take it to heart.

Happy they whose minds are by meditation and prayer rendered familiar with death; and who know that while the grave is the receptacle of their bodies, they have for their souls a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! Happy they who in the view of this are cleaving unto Christ with full purpose of heart. O that we all might be like-minded, living in a habitual dependence upon Christ, and in a zealous performance of his will! Then may we look forward to our dissolution with joy, accounting death our gain! [Philippians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.21), and placing it among our choicest treasures! [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22).

2. To those who understand the certainty of death, and disregard it.

This, alas! forms the greater part of every congregation; insomuch that those who live consistent with this truth are gazed at "as signs and as wonders" in the world. But how foolish will this supineness appear in a little time? We do not positively say, that you will look with regret on your present conduct on your death-bed; for many die as stupid, as ignorant, and as hardened as they lived. But we are well assured, that you will have far other thoughts of your conduct as soon as you come into the presence of your Judge! Let me then entreat you to "redeem the present time," and to "work while it is day; for the night comes wherein no man can work."

#481

JOB'S COMPASSION FOR THE POOR

**[Job 30:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 30.25)**

"Have I not wept for those in trouble?  
 Has not my soul grieved for the poor?"

In the midst of any heavy calamities, a recollection that we have abused the season of prosperity must add greatly to our distress; whereas a consciousness that we have endeavored to fulfill the duties of our station, must afford a rich consolation to the afflicted mind.

It was a matter of comfort to David under the persecutions that he met with from his inveterate enemies, that he had done nothing to provoke their enmity; and that, instead of retaliating their injuries even in thought or desire—he had tenderly felt for them in their troubles, and earnestly sought their welfare, [Psalm 35:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.11-14).

To Job also this thought was a source of much comfort under his accumulated trials. In the passage before us he complains bitterly of his friends, and too rashly also concerning God. And the words of the text may be considered as reflecting on them for treating him otherwise than he had deserved. But we rather suppose the words were introduced as a consolatory reflection, that, though unkindly treated under his own afflictions, he could appeal to God he had conducted himself differently towards others, "Did not I weep for him who was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?"

There are two observations naturally arising from these words, which we shall make the foundation of the following discourse:

I. The poor, when they are in trouble, are objects of great compassion.

The poor, while they enjoy their health, and are under no extraordinary pressure, are quite as happy as the rich. If they have fewer comforts, they do not feel the lack of them; and they are, in a great measure, strangers to those vexations and disappointments, which are the usual attendants of wealth. They, for the most part, enjoy their plain meal with a keener appetite and relish, than they who are fed with delicacies; and, while the richer and more luxurious are wakeful upon beds of down—the poor rest in comfort on a bed of straw, and "their sleep is sweet unto them." If we had complete access both to the rich and poor, and could perfectly weigh the personal and domestic happiness of each, I am persuaded we should find the scale very generally turn in favor of the poor; for what they lose in respect of carnal indulgences, is more than made up to them by peace and contentment.

But when sickness comes, then the inconveniences of poverty begin to be deeply felt. The well-earned pittance which was adequate to the wants of a man and his family while in health, is utterly insufficient to procure medical assistance, and to provide those comforts which are requisite for the alleviation of pain, or the restoration of health and strength. The industrious husband finds all his exertions ineffectual; and is reduced to the necessity of leaving his wife or child to languish without help, or of plunging himself into inextricable difficulties by his endeavors to obtain a suitable, but uncertain, relief.

But suppose the head of the family himself to be seized with sickness; then, with increasing needs, there comes an increased incapacity to supply them. The little stream that before nourished and refreshed the family, is cut off, and ceases to flow in its accustomed channel. What now can he do? Perhaps it may be said "Let him apply to his parish for relief." True, but it is painful to a generous mind to become burdensome to others. He who has been accustomed to maintain his family by his own labor, does not like to become a pensioner on the bounty of others without an absolute and irresistible necessity. He knows, possibly from his own experience, that many are obliged to pay for the support of others, while they themselves scarcely know how to provide for their own subsistence. Hence he nobly struggles with his difficulties; and carries the conflict perhaps beyond the bounds of prudence, while from tenderness to others he forgets the regard which he should show to himself and his own family.

Conceive, then, his distress. Behold him debilitated with disease, and racked with pain. Behold him destitute of the remedies that might remove his disorder. See him incurring debts which it will be difficult for him ever to discharge. Perhaps at last he applies for relief; and then is told, that, while he has this or that comfort, which the industry of former years had enabled him to procure, he cannot be relieved. See him then compelled to sell first one thing, then another; thus stripping himself and family of the little comforts that remained to them; and, after all, witnessing the privations, the needs, the miseries of his benumbed and starving dependents.

This is no uncommon picture; it is seen in every town, and almost in every village, through the kingdom; though, probably, less in this than in any other nation upon earth. And is not such a person an object of compassion? Who does not "weep over him, and whose soul is not grieved for him?"

Yes, we must declare to all, that,

II. To exercise compassion towards them is one of the principal duties of a Christian.

There is no duty more strongly inculcated than that of compassion to the poor; every species of argument is used in Scripture in order to enforce the observance of it.

1. Compassion to the poor is enforced by arguments taken from **political expediency**.

God does not disdain to urge upon us such considerations as are calculated to affect even a selfish mind.

Does not every one desire to relieve himself? This we do, in fact, when we relieve the poor; for all of us are members of one body; consequently our neighbor demands the same attention from us as ourselves, [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.25-26); and, in neglecting him, we "hide ourselves from our own flesh, [Isaiah 58:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.7)."

Are not we ourselves liable to fall into adversity? No man knows what circumstances he may be brought into before he dies. We have seen in our day princes and nobles subsisting upon the charity of others, and many of them on a very slender pittance too. Would not we then, if reduced to poverty, desire to find compassion in the bosom of others? And, if so, ought we not to exercise it ourselves? [Hebrews 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.3). Methinks our charity should be extended to the utmost verge of prudence and propriety, [Ecclesiastes 11:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.1-2).

Would we desire Divine consolations under our afflictions? To be charitable to others is one way to secure them. Hear what God has said, "Blessed is the man who considers (not slightly pities, but with a deep interest in their welfare considers) the poor and needy; the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble. …The Lord will make all his bed in his sickness, [Psalm 41:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.1-3). See also [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11). Draw out your soul, not your purse merely. What greater inducement to charity would we desire, than such a hope and prospect as this?

Would we get the best possible interest for our money? There is no such bank in the universe as this. To enrich ourselves by giving away, and by giving the very "first-fruits, and that too of all our increase," may seem strange indeed; reason would say that it was the way to impoverish ourselves; but God tells us that it is the way to "fill our barns with plenty, and to make our presses burst out with new wine, [Proverbs 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.7); [Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10)." And experience proves that "if we give to others, men will in our necessity give into our bosom, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over! [Luke 6:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.38)."

To complete this argument. Would we keep our wealth forever? This is the way to do so. They who hoard up their riches must leave them all behind them, [Luke 12:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.33); but they who dispose of their wealth in acts of charity, carry it with them into the eternal world, where it shall be restored to them with interest, [Luke 18:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.22). They lend their money to the Lord, who has pledged himself to repay them in full, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17)," yes, to recompense them in the resurrection of the just, [Luke 14:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.12-14); and, provided they have acted from Christian principles, to give them eternal life [1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19). He has even promised to proportion their harvest to the seed they have sown, 2 Corinthians 9:6. So that if "the children of light were as wise in their generation as the children of this world," they would, like the poor widow, and the first Christians, be ready to give their whole substance to the poor.

2. Compassion to the poor is enforced by arguments taken from **Christian necessity**.

Here the arguments are far more forcible and impressive.

The exercise of charity is imposed on us, with the authority of a law, by Christ himself! And shall we despise that law? Yes rather, when it comes to us so recommended and enjoined, shall we not labor to the uttermost to fulfill it? This is an argument urged by the great Apostle, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

Our obedience to this law is the criterion whereby we must judge of our regard to Christ. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to liberality, in order "to prove the sincerity of their love, [2 Corinthians 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.8)." And John tells us that all our professions are hypocrisy, and all our experiences a delusion, if we do not exercise this virtue, [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17). Would we then contentedly rest in a state, wherein all our pretensions to religion are vain? Would we proclaim to all men that we have no love to the Father or to Christ? If not, we must delight ourselves in doing good according to our ability.

Our exercise, or neglect, of charity will be the ground of the sentence that in the last day shall be passed upon us! The Judge of the living and dead informs us that the strictest inquiries will be made relative to this point; and that those who have not relieved him in his poor members, will be bidden to depart accursed; while they who have manifested a tender regard for the poor shall be welcomed by him as the children of his heavenly Father, and be exalted by him to the possession of his eternal kingdom, [Matthew 25:34-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-46).

To the same effect he elsewhere says, "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy, [Matthew 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.7);" and James, on the contrary part, says, "He shall have judgment without mercy, who has showed no mercy, [James 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.13)."

Weigh now these considerations, and see if they do not amount to necessity; and whether we must not say, 'Woe is unto me, if I do not cultivate a compassionate and liberal spirit!'

To CONCLUDE.

We have inculcated the necessity of liberality and compassion. But let us not be misunderstood; alms-giving does not make us Christians; but only proves us so. Nor does it prove us Christians, unless it arises from Christian principles. It is faith in Christ that makes us his; and obedience to his will proves us to be his.

But we must further guard the subject from mistake. It is not a transient emotion, or a falling tear, that will suffice, (for many will shed a tear at a moving tale, who have no principle of love in their hearts); but "our souls must be grieved" for the poor; we must lay to heart their needs and miseries, and make it our study and delight to administer to their relief.

Do not let any then be contented with approving the things which they have heard, or with wishing well to the institution that has been recommended to their care; for James justly says, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead! [James 2:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.14-17)." Such compassion will neither profit them nor you. Let such of you then as profess yourselves to be "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved—clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience! [Colossians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12)."

Yes, let all of us stir up within our own bosoms a tender concern for the welfare of our fellow-creatures; and so act now, that on our dying bed we may appeal to God himself, "Did not I weep for him who was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?"

#482

THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARING FOR OUR FINAL ACCOUNT

**[Job 31:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.14)**

"What will I do when God confronts me?  
 What will I answer when called to account?"

The testimony of a good conscience is a source of rich consolation at all times, but more especially when we are suffering under afflictions from God, or calumnies from man. Job, in the midst of all his troubles, was upheld by it; when, without such a support, he must have inevitably sunk under his accumulated burdens. It must be confessed, indeed, that this holy man, when urged and irritated by his uncharitable friends, expressed himself too strongly upon this subject; yet we cannot fail of seeing throughout his whole history, that his conscious integrity enabled him to hold fast by God, and to wait with patience the outcome of his unexpected calamities.

In the passage before us he is specifying many things commonly practiced by others, but from which he had been preserved pure. Among these he mentions his conduct to his servants; and observes that if in this he had been arbitrary and oppressive, he would have a melancholy account indeed to give in the day of judgment, "Then," says he:

"What will I do when God confronts me?

What will I answer when called to account?"

I. These words may be considered as **a weighty reflection**.

Job is contemplating his responsibility to God, together with the impartiality that will be shown in the future judgment.

In speaking of his accountableness to God—Job does not limit it to such actions as are reprobated among men, but mentions it in reference to (what is generally but little regarded) his spirit and temper in domestic duties. He well knew that God took cognizance of small things as well as great, and of things relating to civil and social life as well as those that pertain more immediately to religion. He was certain also, that at God's tribunal the slave and his master, the beggar and the king, would have their cause determined with equal and unerring justice.

Hence, when calumniated and condemned by men, he naturally reflects on the sentence that would be passed upon him at God's tribunal, on the supposition that there were any willful and allowed sin found in him, whatever the nature of that sin might be, and however trivial it might be deemed by the world at large.

Such a reflection will be highly profitable to us also.

For great and heinous sins, as they are called—we all feel ourselves accountable to God; but we scarcely think that any responsibility attaches to the dispositions we manifest in the family or the state. We may be:  
querulous and contentious subjects,  
or proud and oppressive masters,  
or slothful and impertinent servants—  
and yet never imagine that God will notice such "minor faults" in the day of judgment!

The rich and the great are ready to think, that they shall find some favor with God on account of their earthly distinctions; and that, while a poor man who robs or injures them is deserving of the heaviest judgments—they may rob and injure others to ever so great an amount by their extravagance or extortion, and yet pass without censure!

But the great and awesome God has no respect of persons, [Deuteronomy 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.17), but will "judge every man according to his works." And it will be well for us, if we take a retrospect of our actions, and seriously reflect what answer we shall give to God in the day that he shall judge us.

II. These words may also be considered as **an instructive inquiry**.

The inquiry is twofold:

1. If God should call me to his judgment-seat before I have truly repented of my sins, then "What will I **do** when God confronts me?"

Shall we go before him with boldness, as too many rush into his presence now? Will not his impeccable holiness abash us, and his excellency make us afraid? [Job 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.11)."

Shall we hide ourselves from his presence, and elude his search? Where shall we flee in order to effect this? [Psalm 139:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.7-12). In vain shall we, "call upon the rocks to fall upon us, or the hills to cover us!"

Shall we resist his summons? How vain the attempt! "Shall our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us? [Ezekiel 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 22.14)," or, "can we thunder with a voice like his? [Job 40:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.9)."

Let us then bethink ourselves "what we shall do in the day of judgment? To whom shall we flee for help? [Isaiah 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.3)."

2. If God should call me to his judgment-seat before I have truly repented of my sins, then "What will I **answer**when called to account?"

Shall we say with that amiable, but mistaken youth, "I have kept all your commandments, [Matthew 19:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.20)." Alas! which of the commandments have we not broken times without number? Let it only be considered that an angry word is tantamount to murder in God's eyes, [Matthew 5:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.21-22), and an unchaste look is adultery in God's eyes, [Matthew 5:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.28); and we shall find abundant reason, even as holy Job himself did, [Job 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20), to blush and be confounded before the heart-searching God! [Job 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2-3).

If this appears to be too presumptuous, shall we, like the Pharisee, tell him of our comparative goodness? [Luke 18:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.11-12). Suppose we do differ from others, what ground of glorying is this to us? [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7). And how infinitely short have we come of the perfection which God requires of us! Yes, the very disposition to justify ourselves is sufficient to make God utterly abhor us! [Job 9:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-32). [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.14).

Shall we answer that we had other things beside religion to attend to? But what other things? If they were lawful in themselves—then they were not in the least degree incompatible with religion; and if they were sinful—then they ought to have been renounced.

Shall we reply that we did not think God would ever condemn anyone for the lack of saving religion? But why did we entertain so fond a hope? Were we not sufficiently warned to the contrary? Was it possible for God to declare in more express terms his determination to punish impenitent transgressors? [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17). [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-10).

Whatever other answers we may be disposed to make, let us consider whether they do not admit of a reply that shall stop our mouths, and utterly confound us? In this way we shall gather instruction for which we may have reason to bless God forever!

The oblique hints which both Job and his friends repeatedly gave to each other, may lead us further to consider the words, as,

III. **As a solemn warning**.

If a master's unkindness to his servant would bring down upon him the divine judgments—then Job's friends might see, that their uncharitableness towards him would not pass unnoticed. In the same manner, these questions convey a solemn warning:

1. To those who are altogether regardless of true religion.

We are well aware that when a fellow-creature expostulates with such people, they will fill their mouths with arguments, and turn to ridicule "the words of truth and soberness." But it is not a worm like themselves that they must answer, but the living God. Let careless sinners then consider what they shall answer him? And, before they speak peace to themselves, let them think whether he will deem their excuses sufficient? It is by God's judgment that they must stand or fall; and therefore they must be satisfied with nothing which will not satisfy him. It will be to but little purpose to be justified in their own eyes, and in the opinions of a partial world; for if God should refuse his sanction, they will have nothing left but to bewail their folly in everlasting torments!

2. To those who rest in an external and formal religion.

It is not the observance of forms, but the devotion of the heart, that God requires. True religion is to be our business, yes, our very element wherein we live. Our daily care, and our supreme delight, must be to maintain fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and to glorify God by a holy conduct. These are the things which God will inquire into at the last day; and if we tell him then, that such a life was generally reprobated as hypocrisy or enthusiasm, will he account it a sufficient excuse for our conduct? What! He may say, were all the prophets, and apostles, yes, and my only dear Son, too, hypocrites and fanatics? And were others to be condemned in proportion as they resembled these divine patterns? Did you not know in your consciences, even while you ridiculed the godly, that both you, and they, ought to walk as Christ walked?

Know, then, that the form of godliness, however exemplary, will, if destitute of the life and power of it, leave you without excuse in the day of judgment.

3. To those who profess religion, but walk unworthy of it.

Every question put to careless or formal Christians will have tenfold force when addressed to those who profess godliness; for they acknowledge their obligation to piety, and seek to be esteemed as truly religious characters; and therefore to all their other guilt they add the basest hypocrisy if they live in any willful sin. Let those (if such there be among us) who, while they "seem to be religious, either bridle not their tongue, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)," or yield to the solicitations of anger, envy, malice, lewdness, covetousness, or any other vile affection; let them, I say, consider what they shall answer when God shall judge them. If others be punished, much more shall they, [Amos 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.2). [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14); yes, their condemnation shall be increased in proportion to the mercies they have slighted, and the advantages they have abused.

We cannot conclude without adding one word of **direction**.

It has been shown already, what answers will not suffice at the day of judgment. It is but reasonable then to ask: What answer will suffice? To solve this important question, we reply, That surely we must renounce all habitual and allowed sin; but that, with respect to the sins of infirmity that are incident to our fallen nature, we should lie humble before, God [Job 40:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4-5); [Job 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.15), seeking mercy through Christ only, and declaring our affiance in the promises which God has given us in his Word, [Isaiah 43:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.25-26). See this very question, "What shall we do?" and the answer given to it by the voice of inspiration, [Acts 2:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37-38); [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31). Then, though vile, we shall not be cast out; nor shall our past sins be remembered against us any more forever! [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12).

#483

SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY

**[Job 31:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.24-28)**

"If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high."

As hateful as *boasting* is, and justly condemned both by God and man—there are occasions when it is proper, and indeed necessary. For instance; when a character has been grossly calumniated, and can be vindicated only by an appeal to facts, those facts may be adduced, however much the recital of them may tend to proclaim our own praise.

Samuel was constrained to assert the equity of his own administration, when the people cast reflections on him, by desiring to change the form of his government, and to have a king substituted in his place.

Paul also, when traduced by people who sought to destroy his influence in the Church, declared, though much against his will, the honors which had been conferred upon him, and the habits he had invariably maintained, [2 Corinthians 12:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.1-11). Indeed, we would have known comparatively but little of this blessed Apostle, if he had not been compelled by the malevolence of others to make known the hidden principles by which he had been actuated, and the blameless conduct which he had uniformly pursued; and, so far from blaming him for his boasting, we cannot be but thankful that God allowed him to be so injured, and thereby constrained him in self-defense to make known to us so much of his true character.

In like manner we account it a great benefit to the Church, that Job was driven by the heavy accusations that were brought against him, to insist so largely on his own innocence, and to declare so fully the habits and exercises of his former life. Throughout this whole chapter he maintains, in reference to the evils that were laid to his charge, that his conduct had been the very reverse of what his friends supposed. Had he done this in the spirit of the self-applauding Pharisee (Luke 18), he would have acted wrong; but when it was necessary to wipe off the aspersions that were so injuriously cast upon him, he was justified in adducing whatever had a tendency to place his character in its true light.

The verses we have just read are Job's vindication of himself from idolatry. In the days of Job, or at least in the country where he lived, the sun and moon were the only objects to which idolatrous worship was paid; and, as they were out of the reach of the worshipers, the kiss which was afterwards given to idols as an expression of supreme regard, was transferred to them by means of the hand, verse 27, [Hosea 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.2). But Job declared that he had never been guilty of this great impiety. Nay more, he had never, even in heart, given to the creature any portion of that respect which was due only to the Most High God; and if he had, he acknowledged that his sufferings were richly merited, and that as his conduct would have been in fact a denial of his God, he could expect nothing from God but wrath and indignation to all eternity.

I. The disposition here specified.

An undue regard to wealth is extremely common in the world.

The possession of wealth is no evil; it then only becomes an evil, when it is accompanied with a great measure of trust or delight in it. But, fallen and depraved as man by nature is, it is exceeding difficult to view wealth with such indifference as we ought. Our blessed Lord states this, when speaking of the rich youth, who renounced and forsook him, rather than part with his great possessions. He first said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" And then, "How hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!" intending thereby to intimate, that it is almost "impossible" to have riches, and not to trust in them to some measure, [Mark 10:21-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.21-27).

The pleasure that men take in the contemplation of their wealth, whether inherited or acquired, arises from the thought that they are thereby placed, if not entirely—yet in some measure, beyond the reach of evil; and that, in whatever circumstances they may be, they shall have something which will administer to their comfort, [Habakkuk 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.9). But this is idolatry, as we shall show under our second head!

At present, we content ourselves with observing, that this is the view which all natural men have of wealth, and the regard which, under all circumstances, they pay to it.

Whence is it that men are so eager in the pursuit of wealth?

Whence is it that they so earnestly desire it for their children?

Whence is it that all who come to the possession of wealth, or to any great advancement, are congratulated by their friends, and receive those congratulations as suitable to the occasion?

Whence is it, on the contrary, that any heavy losses are considered as so great a misfortune, and call forth either real sympathy, or compliments of condolence?

Is not all this from a presumption that wealth and advancement are in themselves a certain and a positive good? Does it not all imply a hope or confidence in gold?

Would a man who had scraped together a great heap of dust, rejoice because he had gathered so much dust? Surely not! In the same foolish way, does not the satisfaction a man feels from the attainment of riches, show that he has formed an erroneous estimate of their value?

Such then being the disposition specified in our text, we proceed to point out,

II. The sinfulness of an undue regard to wealth.

To act in any way unworthy of God is to deny him, [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16); but to feel such a disposition towards wealth as has been now described, is in a more especial manner to be regarded in this view.

1. An undue regard to wealth denies that God is the ultimate source of happiness to man.

God has called himself "the Fountain of living waters," and has pronounced all creatures to be "broken cisterns that will hold no water." Now what is this but a declaration that to make us happy is his exclusive prerogative? Doubtless the creature, when God accompanies it with his blessing, is a source of much comfort; but it has nothing in itself; the sun, whose genial warmth is such a fruitful source of blessings to some, destroys all the hopes of others, and burns up the very face of the earth.

Thus wealth also, which to some is the means of exercising a most diffusive benevolence, to others is a curse. What was Nabal the better for his wealth? It only fostered his deep-rooted churlishness, and ultimately proved the occasion of his death.

In a word, the creature is nothing but what God is pleased to make it. With his blessing, it will contribute to our happiness; but without his blessing, it is only "vanity and vexation of spirit!" If then we place any confidence in it, or allow it to be a source of supreme delight to our minds, we ascribe to the creature what is found in none but the Lord Jehovah; to whom alone we should have respect, when we say, "Return unto your rest, O my soul."

2. An undue regard to wealth denies that God is all-sufficient for our real happiness.

The man that can look up to a reconciled God in Christ Jesus, has all that he can desire; the wealth of the whole world can add nothing to him. If it be thought that wealth being an addition, must of necessity enlarge the comforts of the soul; we would ask: What can a candle add to the light of the meridian sun? Or who that enjoys the full splendor of that heavenly orb, does not despise the feeble efforts of a candle to augment its luster?

Just so, it is with him who beholds the light of God's glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ; the creature, whoever, or whatever it may be, "has no glory in his eyes by reason of the glory that excels."

Did the prodigal any longer desire the husks which the swine ate of, when he was feeding on the fatted calf in his father's house? Surely not! Nor does he ever hunger, who has fed on Jesus' flesh; or thirst, when once he has been refreshed with the water of life!

Hear the testimony of one who spoke from his own experience, "We are:  
  sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;  
  poor, yet making many rich;  
  having nothing, and yet possessing everything!" [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)."

Now if we desire any earthly good from an idea that it can of itself contribute to our ultimate happiness, we virtually deny the all-sufficiency of Christ; and by exalting the creature to a participation of God's rights, we rob Him of his intrinsic glory.

Improvement.

1. For reproof.

Let this character of Job be compared with that of the generality of professing Christians, and it will afford abundant matter for the deepest humiliation. Certainly, on account of our superior advantages, we ought to possess far greater spirituality of mind than Job; yet how far below him do the generality even of those who profess religion fall!

Perhaps the besetting sin of most of those who profess to be Christians is worldliness! It is certain that very many of them are as eager in the pursuit of wealth as the heathen; and this accounts for the little influence of the Word of God upon them. The seed is good, but the soil is bad! And the noxious weeds of worldliness, by their speedy and incessant growth, keep down the feebler plants of piety in the soul.

"The cares of this world,  
 and the deceitfulness of riches,  
 and the lust for other things,  
 choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful." [Mark 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.19)

And here let it be observed that it is not the overt act of covetousness or creature-dependence that is condemned, but the inward disposition of the mind and heart—the supreme delight of mind that arises from the possession of wealth is itself a positive "denial of the God that is above."

O, brethren, enter into your own bosoms, and judge yourselves in relation to this matter. Inquire whether God has such a full possession of your hearts as to render all earthly things relatively vain, empty, and worthless, in your estimation? If not, how can you call God your portion, or imagine that you have formed a proper estimate of the immeasurable blessings of salvation? Know assuredly, that if you have just views of Christ, you will regard Jesus as the Pearl of Great Price!

"The kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant seeking fine pearls. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it! [Matthew 13:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.45-46)."

Can you will sincerely say from your inmost soul, "Whom have I in Heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" [Psalm 73:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25-26)

2. For instruction in righteousness.

We learn from our text: A true profession of Christ does not consists in a mere assent to some particular truths, but in a practical and experimental sense of His love overpowering all inferior considerations. To love the Lord Jesus Christ, to "cleave to him with full purpose of heart," to count him "all our salvation and all our desire"—this is what God requires. This is also what our blessed Savior deserves from His redeemed people. If we do not despise even life itself, when standing in competition with his will, his presence, his glory—then we shall be regarded as denying him, and must expect to be denied by him in the presence of his Father and his holy angels! [Mark 8:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.34-35); [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38).

In the Church above "there is no need of either sun or moon to lighten it, because the Lamb is the light thereof! [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)" Just so, is it in the Church below, wherever Christ has really established his kingdom in the heart! [Isaiah 24:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 24.23).

See to it then, brethren, that it is thus with you; and, if you are disposed to ask, "Who will show me any good?" then learn immediately to add, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon me; and that shall put more gladness in my heart, than any increase of corn or wine or oil can ever do! [Psalm 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6-7);" for as, on the one hand, "A man's life does not consist not in the abundance of the things that he possesses," so, on the other hand, "In God's favor is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life itself."

#484

THE BENEFIT OF VISITING THE SICK

**[Job 33:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.23-24)**

"Yet if there is an messenger on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand—one who declares a person upright, to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him!'"

Elihu was not one of the particular friends of Job He was a young man, who, on the occasion of Job's friends assembling together, had been admitted to hear rather than to speak. But when he had heard the repeated attempts of Job's friends to convince him of sin, and their incapacity to answer the arguments which Job had adduced—his spirit was stirred in him, and he determined to offer his opinion, [Job 32:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 32.6-10). Elihu was of a better spirit than Job's other friends, and had a deeper insight into the dispensations of God's providence. He never accused Job of hypocrisy, as they had done; but he saw wherein Job had erred, and endeavored with fidelity to point it out to him. Job had certainly erred in two respects:  
in speaking too highly of himself,  
in speaking too disrespectfully of God.

To bring home to him these two faults, Elihu shows Job, what he evidently was not sufficiently acquainted with, the ends and designs of God in afflicting man; namely, to humble him, and to prepare him for those richer mercies which he has in reserve for every true penitent.

There were various means whereby God prepared men for the knowledge of himself, and the enjoyment of his glory:  
one was by secret discoveries of Himself in dreams and visions;  
another was by laying them on a bed of affliction, and sending some well-informed servant to instruct them.

It is of this latter mode that Elihu speaks in the words before us; from which we are naturally led to show you,

I. The office of those who visit the sick.

A person who in a spirit of love visits the chambers of the sick, as "a messenger" from the Most High God, and one who delights in that office, and is duly qualified for the performance of it—is indeed a rare and valuable character, justly called "One among a thousand!" The object which such a person should bear in view is briefly stated in our text; it is "one who declares a person upright."

But whose uprightness is here intended? The man's own? Most assuredly not. Such a visitor as this would be neither rare nor valuable. It is the common language of ignorant people when visiting a dying friend, to say, "You have nothing to fear; you have been upright and honest in the world; you have fulfilled all your duties in life; and there is no doubt but that you are accepted by God." Such a visitor as this is indeed "a messenger;" but it is "a messenger of Satan," to beguile and ruin an immortal soul. For what is such language as this, but to "speak peace where there is no peace," or, as the prophet strongly expresses it, to "sew pillows to the arm-holes" of one that ought to be awakened from his delusions, and to "daub with untempered mortar a wall that is just ready to fall! [Ezekiel 13:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.10-11); [Ezekiel 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.18)."

The uprightness that is to be pointed out, is God's. But here we acknowledge, that the precise import of the passage is not easy to be determined. Various are the senses which commentators have affixed to the word; but, if we would obtain just views of the Scripture, we must not consider so much what sense any word will bear—as what agrees best with the context. Now we apprehend that the context duly attended to, will give us the exact meaning of this expression.

Let us see what was the object which Elihu had in view. He considered Job as faulty in two respects:  
first, in maintaining his own righteousness,  
and next, in complaining of God as harsh and unjust towards him, verses 8-12.

"In this," he says to Job, "you are not just." To counteract these two errors, Elihu tells Job that God had afflicted him on purpose to lead him to juster views both of himself and of his God; and that he himself was sent as "a messenger and interpreter" to him, "one among a thousand," to expound this matter to him; and to show him "God's uprightness, or righteousness," first, in punishing his sin; and, next, in the way provided by him for the pardon of it.

1. The visitor's office then, is to show the righteousness of God in **punishing** sin.

It is common for people in affliction, especially if their afflictions are heavy, complicated, and of long continuance; to manifest an impatient spirit, and to account their trials severe. But every thought of this kind shows how regardless they are of the hand from whence their trials proceed, and of their own extreme demerit, which, if justly viewed, would reconcile them to any afflictive dispensation which Almighty God might send. The invariable language of those who are truly humbled is, "You, Lord, have punished me far less than my iniquities deserve!" "You are righteous in all that is come upon me!" "To you belongs righteousness; but unto me belongs shame and confusion of face!" See [Ezra 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.13). [Nehemiah 9:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.33). [Daniel 9:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.7-8)."

This truth had been before inculcated by Zophar [Job 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.6); and it is of great importance to be inculcated on all; for, "shall a living man complain—a man for the punishment of his sins? [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39)." No! He must be brought to "accept the punishment of his iniquity," and to say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him! [Micah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.9)." There must be no "replying against God;" "the clay must not contend with the potter!"

The attitude to which every sufferer must be brought is this, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good to Him!" It is a very important part of a visitor's office to bring him to it, by showing, that anything short of "everlasting burnings" is a mercy for which we have reason to be thankful—and not a judgment of which we have any reason to complain; since it is light in comparison with what we deserve, and is sent on purpose to keep us from ever suffering our full desert in Hell.

2. The visitor's office is also to show the righteousness of God, in His way of **pardoning** sin.

This, we confess, appears at first sight a forced construction of the passage; but, on a nearer inspection of it, we shall see reason to believe that it is indeed the true import. The uprightness of God in punishing sin seems undoubtedly the first and leading sense; but it must include a view of the way of salvation through the ransom paid for sinners, or else the immediate acceptance of the sinner through that ransom could not follow from it. In this view of the word "uprightness," or "righteousness," there is a striking coincidence between the text and some passages in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle again and again mentions, "the righteousness which is of God by faith," and represents Christ as "set forth to be an atoning sacrifice through faith in his blood, to declare God's righteousness for, or in, the remission of sins; to declare, I say, his righteousness, that he might be just, and yet the Justifier of him which believes in Jesus! [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.21-22); [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26)."

Now on what occasion can it be so necessary to "show a man this," as when he is in sick and dying circumstances, and speedily about to enter into the immediate presence of his God? Then in particular he is anxious to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" And then must we give him the same answer as the Apostle did to the jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall he saved! [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31)."

This, then, is the special office of those who visit the sick; namely, to declare freely and fully the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. They should act in the chambers of the sick precisely as Moses did in the camp of Israel; when thousands were dying of the wounds inflicted by the fiery flying serpents; they should erect in the sight of the dying penitent the bronze serpent, and say, "Look unto it and be saved, all the ends of the earth! Compare [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22) with [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15)." They should encourage the afflicted soul to look unto Christ even "at the eleventh hour;" and to declare plainly, that "all who believe in him are justified from all things! [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)." Then indeed will they approve themselves to be faithful "messengers" from God, and just "interpreters" of his mind and will; and every messenger is of inestimable value, and fitly called, "One among a thousand!"

Such being the blessed office of a visitor, let us contemplate,

II. The benefit arising from a faithful discharge of a godly visitor's office.

Doubtless in most instances, little, if any, good arises from efforts made in the chambers of the sick; and often the hopeful appearances that begin there, vanish speedily, "as the early dew, or as the morning cloud." But in many instances the labors of visitors are productive of the greatest good:

1. Even to the **bodies** of men.

We speak not now of financial relief, and of its effects on the recovery of many from their illnesses, though we ought not by any means to lose sight of that.

It is solely of the spiritual office of the visitor that we speak; and we affirm, that the bodies of men often derive incalculable benefit from it. Of illnesses, some belong purely to the body; and others are greatly influenced by the mind, or perhaps originate altogether from it.

Now, in reference to the former of these, it is certain, that spiritual instruction will not operate as a charm upon the body; but if, under the pressure of temporal affliction, the mind is disquieted by impatience and fretfulness, then those agitations will have a very unfavorable aspect on the body, and will greatly impede the cure of the disorder. Consequently, the composure of the mind, the bringing of it to a state of resignation and submission, and particularly to a state of peace with God—will exceedingly promote the recovery of the body; so true is it that "A merry heart does good like a medicine."

It sometimes happens, that the life of a person a actually preserved, solely, under God, by the composure of the mind. A most remarkable instance of this the author has in his own parish. But if, as in the latter case, the disorder is very intimately connected with the mind, and how many nervous disorders arise from the pressure of worldly troubles—then it is obvious that the spiritual physician may be more useful than a medical attendant; since by administering "the balm of Gilead" to the soul, he applies his remedy to the root of the disorder, and gains access to that which no earthly prescription can reach.

And more especially if, as sometimes happens, the health has declined through apprehensions of God's wrath, and the influence of desponding fears—then the free and full exhibition of God's mercy in Christ Jesus is the only remedy that is at all suited to the case; and the restoration of peace to the soul is, in fact, "health to the body and nourishment to the bones! [Proverbs 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.8)." "A reliable messenger," says Solomon, "brings healing, [Proverbs 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.17)."

2. More especially to the **souls** of men.

How many are there who never began to think of their souls, until they were visited with sickness, or brought down by some heavy affliction! "Before they were afflicted they went astray;" but God having sent to them some kind messenger, some able interpreter—has led them by his means to a consideration of their state, and to a true and saving repentance.

No man has ever executed with fidelity the office of which we are speaking, without having seen some fruit of his labor; and we will venture to appeal to such people, for they are the only competent judges, whether they have not been sometimes eye-witnesses of the very scene described in our text? Have they not seen the afflicted soul comforted; and peace abounding in the conscience that was recently overwhelmed with desponding fears? Has not God said, as it were, in their very presence, "Deliver that drooping sinner from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom!" And have they not seen the person, who but just before dared not to lift up his eyes unto Heaven, "praying unto God" and made sensible "of His favor," and "beholding the face of his reconciled God with joy! verse 26."

Yes, this is no uncommon sight; and whoever will lend himself diligently to this good work, shall have the happiness of dispensing these blessings, and of having some poor sinners to be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of judgment.

Reflections.

1. How **honorable** an office is that of a visitor of the sick!

This office, though highly proper to be executed by ministers, ought by no means to be confined to them. True, such a person, duly qualified and thoroughly in earnest, is "One among a thousand!" but It would have been better, if possible, that there should be ten or twenty such among a thousand; and most assuredly it is the duty of every Christian, according to his ability and opportunities, to engage in it; since the execution of it is a very principal fruit and evidence of "pure and undefiled religion, [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27)."

We would call on all, therefore, in their respective stations, to consider how they may execute this office to the utmost possible advantage. And let all know for their encouragement, that if they receive not honor from their fellow-creatures for these self-denying exertions—they shall certainly before long be honored and rewarded by their God! [Matthew 25:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-36).

2. How **blind** are those who are averse to have such pious instructors introduced to their sick and dying friends!

There exists in the minds of many an idea, that religious conversation will prove injurious to a person on a bed of sickness; and that, by the anxiety that it will create, it will retard, rather than accelerate, a restoration to health.

Now, if in any instance this should be the case, it may justly be said that some risk of injury to the body would be but a small sacrifice for the obtaining of spiritual instruction under such circumstances. For who can reflect on a soul perishing in ignorance and sin, and not see the indispensable necessity of plucking it as a brand out of the burning, before yet it is gone beyond a hope of recovery? Methinks, if a certainty of some injury to the bodily health were put in the scale against the near and almost certain prospect of dying in an unconverted state—there can be no doubt which should preponderate. No man that knows the value of an immortal soul, can hesitate which alternative to choose.

But such cases, if they exist at all, are very rare; the mind of an ungodly man is not so easily moved; nor are the emotions that may be excited so injurious as worldly vexation or worldly care—they do not prey upon the mind, as carnal feelings do. Religious feelings, even where they are not altogether of the best kind, have rather a tendency to compose the mind; inasmuch as they generate a hope in God, and open prospects of progressive improvement and of ultimate salvation.

But we will not rest this matter upon the dictates either of reason or experience; God himself shall determine it; and he says, "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, [James 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.13)."

Doubtless it is expedient for the visitor to consult the weakness of the patient; but it is the height of cruelty to deny to those who are shortly going into the presence of their God, the means of obtaining that wedding-garment that can alone make them acceptable guests at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

3. How desirable is it to support such a society for visiting the sick!

But how can they execute their functions, if not aided by financial contributions? The poor, if some relief can be afforded to them in their sickness, will on that account welcome the Visitor as "a Messenger" from Heaven; and, having received him as "a Messenger," they will be disposed to listen to him as "an Interpreter."

It cannot be supposed, that the visitors can effect much in this way from their own individual resources; it must be through the liberality of the public alone that this plan can be executed to any great extent. Let the hearts of all, then, be open on this occasion.

If we pleaded only for the temporal relief of our poorer brethren in a time of sickness, we would feel that we had a claim upon your charity; but the temporal relief is of small importance when compared with that which we contemplate the instruction and salvation of the soul. Bear this in mind, and let your contributions show in what light you appreciate an immortal soul. Multitudes who would otherwise die in ignorance and sin may by these means be rescued from eternal perdition; and, if our blessed Lord came down from Heaven to "ransom" them by his own blood, let it be a light matter in your eyes to contribute liberally of your substance for the purpose of making known to them that "ransom," and thereby "delivering them from going down to the pit!"

#485

THE NATURE AND EFFICACY OF REPENTANCE

**[Job 33:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.27-28)**

"Then he comes to men and says: I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light."

God is often pleased to make use of affliction as the means of bringing people to a right mind; and where he has sent any affliction as a chastisement for some particular sin, it is probable that on our repentance he will remove the chastisement, [James 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.14-15).

But we must not always associate the ideas of affliction and punishment, or of repentance and recovery, so as to conclude every person to be wicked in proportion to the calamities that may come upon him. This was the error which occasioned the whole controversy between Job and his friends. They conceived, that, by visiting him with such accumulated afflictions, God designed to point him out as a hypocrite; and, upon that presumption, they exhorted him to repent, and assured him that on his repentance God would restore to him his former health and prosperity. In support of their argument they spoke many valuable truths; but they erred in the extent to which they carried those truths, and in the application which they made of them to the case of Job.

The fact is, that "no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner, [Ecclesiastes 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.1-2)" All of the inequalities which we observe in the dispensations of Providence will be rectified in the day of judgment, which is on that very account denominated, "The day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)."

We shall therefore drop that which we apprehend to be the primary meaning of these words, because in that sense they are not true to the extent that Elihu designed them. We know that the most righteous people may be reduced by sickness, and that the most penitent people may have their sickness continued unto death. Fully persuaded of this, we shall not insist upon our text in reference to bodily sickness and recovery, but simply in reference to the concerns of the soul. In this view of the words, they point out to us,

I. The **nature** of true repentance.

Few consider properly the nature of repentance. It does not consist in a mere acknowledgment that we are sinners, or in a dread of the consequences of our sin.

1. True repentance consists in a deep and humbling view of sin as **unreasonable**.

The law of God is right, [Psalm 19:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7-8); it is "holy, and just, and good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12)." And whoever views its requisitions with an impartial eye, must of necessity confess them to be most highly reasonable. Who can doubt one moment the reasonableness of the creature serving his Creator; or of the sinner feeling gratitude to his Redeemer? Who does not see the propriety of having the bodily appetites in subjection to the nobler faculties of reason and conscience; and of governing our lives in reference to eternity, rather than to the poor vanities of time and sense? The most ignorant and most prejudiced person cannot but acknowledge that these things are "right."

Now what is the life of the generality, but a direct opposition to all this, or, in other words, "a perversion of that which is right?" We speak not now concerning gross sins, but concerning that kind of life which even the most moral and decent live. They forget their God; they disregard their Savior; they live as if they thought the salvation of their souls a matter of little importance.

A true penitent, when he comes to a just sense of his condition, views things in this light; he is ready to exclaim with Agur, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man! [Proverbs 30:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.2)." He is amazed that God should have borne with him so long in the midst of his perverseness; and there are no terms too humiliating for him to adopt, in order to express his shame and self-abhorrence before God.

2. True repentance consists in a deep and humbling view of sin as **unprofitable**.

All expect that sin will profit them in some respect or other; and the gratifications purchased by it are considered as more than an equivalent for any consequences that may ensue from it.

This delusion often lasts for a considerable time; but, when a person begins to turn unto God, the scales fall from his eyes. He now sees, that if he had actually gained the whole world, it would have been an unprofitable bargain for his immortal soul.

He feels himself much in the state that our first parents were after their fall. What Satan had promised them was indeed true in some sense, "their eyes were opened; and they discerned good and evil." But it was good which they had lost, and evil which they had incurred. Ah! how unprofitable did their sin now appear! For one taste of the forbidden fruit to sacrifice their innocence and the favor of their God!

If we contemplate their feelings when they were driven out of Paradise, we shall form some idea of what a penitent feels, when once he comes to a just apprehension of his state. His folly appears to him even greater than his guilt. He now begins to understand those words, "Madness is in their hearts while they live! [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3);" and he feels the full force of that pointed interrogation, "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! [Romans 6:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.20-21)."

That we may not be discouraged by this view of repentance, let us contemplate,

II. The **benefits** of true repentance.

We have before assigned our reasons for declining to notice our text in reference to a recovery from bodily sickness; on that subject we could promise you nothing with any certainty; but in reference to spiritual benefits, we do not hesitate to promise you:

1. The first benefit of true repentance is **deliverance from eternal condemnation**.

Besides "the pit" of the grave, there is also a pit into which sinners must be cast, even "the bottomless pit"—the miserable abode of Satan and his angels! [Revelation 20:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.1-3). Into that pit your soul shall never come. The impenitent alone shall have their portion there. The word and oath of Jehovah are pledged to rescue you from thence. "He has found a ransom! verse 24;" the ransom has been paid; and God (if we may so speak) would violate his engagements with his Son, if he were to spurn from his footstool one who came to him in the name of Jesus, [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26). But you need not be afraid; for this is his own gracious declaration, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9);" and again, "He who covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy! [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)."

Perhaps from a retrospect of your past lives you may be led to fear that you have sinned beyond the reach of mercy. But there is no ground for despondency, even to the vilest of mankind; the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse from all sin, however heinous! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7); and the promises of acceptance through him are so extensive as to preclude all possibility of doubt to those who humbly rely upon them, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18). [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37).

2. The second benefit of true repentance is **exaltation to eternal glory**.

The light of God's reconciled countenance shall certainly be enjoyed by the penitent in this world, "his light shall rise in obscurity, and his darkness shall become as the noon-day." But who can conceive of that "light" which he shall enjoy in the glorious world to come! The highest joys which the soul can experience here on earth, are no more in comparison with Heaven, than a candle is of the meridian sun. There "the sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end! [Isaiah 60:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19-20)."

There may be many dark nights, and tremendous storms, before we arrive at the full consummation of our happiness; but the word is sure, that "if we sow in tears we shall reap in joy! [Psalm 126:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5-6)."

We may learn from hence,

1. What encouragement we have to repent.

God represents himself in the text as "looking upon men;" he is looking continually to see if he can find an object towards whom he can exercise mercy consistently with the honor of his other perfections. The father, in the parable, is described as looking out, as it were, with an ardent desire for the return of his prodigal son, and as running towards him as soon as ever he beheld him a great way off. This gives us a just idea of the tender compassions of our God, who "wills not the death of any sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live."

We have a still livelier representation of this in the Prophet Jeremiah, [Jeremiah 31:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18); [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20); and we may with great propriety conceive of God as looking wishfully upon us at this moment, and saying, "O that they would hearken unto my voice! [Psalm 81:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.13-16)." "Will you not be made clean? When shall it once be? [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.27)."

Be persuaded, my brethren, that God is now "waiting to be gracious unto you;" and that if you turn unto him, he will have mercy upon you! [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7). Yes, he will make his "grace to abound even where sin has most abounded! [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20)."

2. How just will be the condemnation of the impenitent.

God's direction to every one of us is, "Only acknowledge your iniquity! [Jeremiah 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.13)." And what can he require of you less than this? Would you yourselves forgive an offending child, while she obstinately refused to acknowledge her fault and continued in her disobedience? What then will you say to God in the day of judgment, when he shall refuse to admit you into the regions of light and bliss, and shall consign your souls over to that bottomless pit, from which you made no effort to escape? How pungent will be the recollection of those invitations and promises which you now despise! O do not by your obstinate impenitence make work for everlasting and unavailing sorrow!

Do but call to mind the mercy given to David; the very instant he said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord," Nathan was inspired to reply, "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die! [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13)." And this affecting incident David himself records for the encouragement of all to make supplication to their God, "I said, I will confess my sin unto the Lord; and so you forgave the iniquity of my sin! [Psalm 32:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.5)." Surely if such an example joined to the gracious declarations in the text do not lead you to repentance, then your mouths will be shut in the day of judgment, and (whatever you may now do) you will acknowledge your condemnation to be just!

#486

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IN FAVOR WITH GOD

**[Job 34:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.29)**

"When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?  
 When He hides His face, who then can behold Him?"

God orders and appoints all things throughout the universe! Nations are not so mighty as not to need his superintending care, nor are any individuals so insignificant as to be disregarded by him.

The words immediately following the text show that the text itself is equally applicable to nations or to individuals. The history of the Jews is a striking commentary on them in the former view. The experience of every man attests the truth of them in the latter view. Waving the less profitable consideration of the text, we observe,

I. None can trouble those whom God **comforts**.

God is pleased to bestow peculiar quietness on his redeemed people.

He sprinkles their souls with the blood of his dear Son, [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22); hence they enjoy peace with God, and in their own consciences, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1). By his Holy Spirit also he sheds abroad his love in their hearts, [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5); hence they maintain a filial confidence towards him, [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-16). Moreover he convinces them of his own continual care over them, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28); hence their minds are established in the most trying circumstances, [Job 5:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19-24).

This quietness which God grants to his redeemed people, is widely different from the false peace enjoyed by the world.

There is a kind of peace possessed even by the ungodly, [Luke 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21), but it flows only from inconsiderateness or delusion; it vanishes as soon as light breaks in upon the soul; hence the wicked cannot be said to enjoy true and solid peace, [Isaiah 57:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.21).

But the peace of God's people consists in a resignation to his will, trust in his promises, assurance of his love, and an expectation of his glory; hence the Apostle speaks of it in the most exalted terms! [Philippians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.7).

When God grants his peace to the souls of his redeemed people—then none can effectually trouble them.

The question is much stronger than the strongest affirmation; it is a triumphant challenge to the whole universe It is not said here that none will endeavor to trouble the true believer; for it is certain that both the world and Satan will exert all their influence for this end; [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12). [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8). Nor is it said that God's children shall never have cause for trouble, for they are liable to pain, sickness, etc. as much as others. But it is affirmed, that none shall greatly or materially trouble them; and this assertion is verified by daily experience.

They who enjoy God's presence may disregard the pressures of poverty, [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18); nor will they be discouraged by the persecutions of man, or the temptations of Satan, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Every child of God therefore may adopt the Apostle's words in [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31), "If God is for us, then who can be against us?" He may assume the triumphant language of Messiah himself in [Isaiah 1:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.7-9).

On the other hand, God's determinations are irresistible also with respect to his enemies, so that:

II. None can comfort those whom God **troubles**.

Though God does not leave it in the power of creatures to trouble his people, he does not see fit altogether to exempt them from trouble. He sometimes, for wise and gracious reasons, hides his face from them.

David had frequent occasion to lament the loss of God's presence, [Psalm 30:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.7); [Psalm 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 13.1). It was a subject of complaint with the Church of old, [Isaiah 49:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14). Even our Lord himself cried out by reason of sorrow, [Matthew 27:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.46). There is therefore a solemn propriety in the prophet's address to God, [Isaiah 45:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.15).

Nor can any comfort the ungodly at such seasons. The last clause of the text admits of two different interpretations; it may import, either that none can behold God with comfort, when he hides his face from them. Or, that if God hides his face from anyone, men will no longer look upon him, or at least that they cannot so look upon him as to impart comfort to him. The sense we adopt includes both: God will not, and men cannot, comfort those from whom God hides his face.

Job speaks of himself as quite disconsolate under the hidings of God's face, [Job 3:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 3.23-24). David also describes the anguish of his heart on a similar occasion, [Psalm 102:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.1-11); and universal experience confirms the truth of Job's assertion, [Job 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 12.14).

The wicked, however, are more awfully exposed to these tokens of God's displeasure.

They are now indeed, for the most part, insensible of God's absence from them; but at the hour of death they will feel the whole weight of his indignation! [Romans 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.8-9). God will then assuredly hide his face from them, and bid them to depart from him! [Deuteronomy 32:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.20). "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41)."

And who can comfort them the wicked, when they are in such an awful state?

Sinners even here on earth are often made utterly inconsolable. This is clearly exemplified in Judas, [Matthew 27:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.3-5); but, in the eternal world, God himself will afford them no comfort. The angels will certainly administer none. The angels will rather be the executioners of God's vengeance, [Matthew 13:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.41); nor can their fellow-creatures help them in the least. Their wicked companions will only increase their misery, as may be inferred from the solicitude which the Rich Man manifested respecting the probable condemnation of his five brethren, [Luke 16:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.27-28); and the righteous will not afford them so much as a drop of water to cool their tongue! [Luke 16:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.24-25). They cannot derive any comfort from reflections on the past; nor can they find consolation in their prospects of the future. Thus can they find no comfort from without, or from within.

APPLICATION.

1. To those who are seeking rest and quietness in the world.

How poor a portion is the world, in comparison with God! How absurd would it appear if anyone should affirm of the world what is here affirmed respecting God.

Should anyone ask, 'If the world comforts me, who can trouble me?'

We answer, without fear of contradiction, 'Conscience, if awakened by God, may trouble you. Pain and sickness may disquiet you. The prospect of death may appal you. And, above all, the wrath of God shall trouble you forever, if you continue to seek your happiness in the world!'

If, on the contrary, anyone says, 'When the world troubles me, then who can comfort me?'

Then we may refer him to that unalterable declaration of the prophet, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3). Let every one then acquiesce in the decision of Solomon, [Ecclesiastes 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 1.14); and let Christ be regarded as the true and only source of rest! [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28).

2. To those who now enjoy quietness in God.

Peace, however firmly established at present, may soon be lost; it can be maintained only in a way of holiness, [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17). Sin indulged, will cause God to hide his face from us. This is the true source of the disquietudes which many feel, [Isaiah 59:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.2). Let all therefore mortify secret and besetting sins. In this way they shall attain happiness in life, in death, and forever! [Psalm 119:165](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.165) and 2 Peter 1:10-11.

#487

THE IMPIETY AND FOLLY OF MANKIND

**[Job 35:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 35.9-10)**

"Men cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful. But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker(s), who gives songs in the night.'"

In investigating so deep a mystery as what is generally called the doctrine of the Trinity, we ought, beyond all doubt, to look for clear and solid ground whereon to found our judgment; and happily there is ample proof, throughout the whole Scriptures, that, though there is but one God, there is in the Godhead a distinction of persons, who are severally revealed to us as possessing all the attributes of Deity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are represented as concurring in the great work of Redemption:  
the Father sending his Son into the world;  
the Son laying down his life for us;  
and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, to apply that redemption to our souls.

This distinction is especially recognized by every one who is received into the Christian Church; every one being, by the express command of Christ himself, baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In so important a doctrine as this we may reasonably expect to find that, though the clear and full manifestation of it might be reserved for the Messiah, some intimations of it should be given from the beginning of the world.

Accordingly, we find that, at the very creation of man, the Sacred Three consulted, if I may so speak, with each other, in reference to this matter, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, [Genesis 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.26)."

Again, when man had fallen, and the punishment denounced against transgression was to be inflicted on him, the same concert between them is marked, "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil, [Genesis 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.22)."

In like manner, when, after the Deluge, the inhabitants of the earth were devising a plan for their own consolidation and aggrandizement, and God determined to defeat it, the language used by Jehovah on the occasion was precisely similar, "But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other, [Genesis 11:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 11.5-7)."

Moreover, in many passages where God is mentioned, his name is put in the plural number; as when it is said, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," it is in the original, "Remember your Creators [Ecclesiastes 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.1)." And the noun thus plural is often united to a singular verb; thus it is said, "Your Makers are your husband [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5);" and again in my text, "None says, Where is God, my Makers?"

The particular occasion on which my text was spoken seems to have been this: All of Job's friends interpreted his expressions in a way more unfavorable than truth or equity required. Elihu, after doing this in numerous instances, specifies, as a further proof of Job's supposed impiety, that he had complained of God, as not attending to the cry of the oppressed, either in his own case or in that of others, alluding probably to what Job had said in chapter 24:12, in reference to others; and in 19:7 and 30:20, in reference to himself. In answer to which, Elihu says, that this arose from the people themselves, who under their troubles complained and murmured, but never, in a befitting manner, inquired after God, to seek relief from him.

Now, in this answer, as containing a general and a very important truth, Elihu marks, in very strong characters, the impiety and folly of ungodly men; but, in the answer, as intimating also a plurality of persons in the Godhead, there is an extraordinary force, which places their guilt in a most aggravated point of view.

That we may exhibit this truth in its just light, we shall proceed to mark distinctly the impiety and folly of ungodly men.

I. The **impiety** of the wicked.

The assertion must, of course, be limited to unconverted men; but of all classes of them, without exception, it is true. Paul, showing that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, are alike under sin, cites a variety of passages to prove his point, and which fully prove also the declaration in my text, "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one! [Romans 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-12)." As humiliating as this description of human nature is, it is strictly true!

1. No unconverted man has a proper sense of his **duty to God**.

Men will acknowledge that there is a Supreme Being; and that they owe him allegiance as their Creator and Governor; but practically they pay no regard to his authority whatever. His Law is no law to them; they take no pains to ascertain his will; and, if it is stated to them as the rule of their conduct, they pour contempt upon it, and determine to regulate themselves by a standard of their own! The language of their hearts is, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us? [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)." "As for the word which is spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not obey it! [Jeremiah 44:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16);" but we will certainly do whatever comes into our own mind, and "every one of us will walk after the imagination of his own evil heart! [Jeremiah 18:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.12)." "We know not the Lord; neither will we obey his voice! [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2)."

If this statement appears too strong, look around you, and see where you can find people truly and abidingly influenced by the fear of God. Truly, whatever appearance of that principle there may be in some who are more religiously inclined, the true vital principle itself is found in none but those who have been "renewed in the spirit of their minds" by the power of the Holy Spirit! [Ephesians 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23).

2. No unconverted man has a proper **dependence on God**.

As men will acknowledge the existence of God, so will they, in words, confess his providence also. But who receives everything as from God? Who looks to him to order everything in his behalf! Who realizes the idea that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the special appointment of God? Who has not his attention so fixed on second causes, as almost to overlook the First great Cause of all? It is undeniable that men are universally "leaning to their own understanding," or "making flesh their arm," or "saying to the fine gold: You are my confidence;" and that, to be satisfied with all that God does, and, in the absence of all human help, to trust simply and confidently in him, is an attainment far out of the reach of the natural man, whoever he may be.

3. No unconverted man has a proper **desire after God**.

Where do we ever hear the language of the Psalmist? "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory! [Psalm 63:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-2)." Does "the hunted deer, panting after the water-brooks, justly represent the desires of men's souls for God? [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2)." Does their delight in his Word, or their earnestness in prayer, or their contempt of all sublunary good—evince that God is indeed the chief object of their desire? Where shall we find the people who can with truth make that appeal to God, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you! [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)."

The truth is, that they are content to live "without God in the world, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12);" that "he is not in all their thoughts, [Psalm 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4);" and that, if they were to be assured that there was no such Being in existence, it would give them no concern at all; they would sleep as soundly, and eat their food as pleasantly, and spend the morrow as cheerfully—as if no such information had been given to them. Yes, rather, instead of occasioning them any pain, it would accord with what God himself declares to be the wish of their hearts, "The fool has said in his heart: No God for me! [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1)."

A more distinct view of our text will further exhibit to us,

II. The **folly** of the wicked.

It is the peculiar prerogative of God to "give songs in the **night**".

This is the office, and this the blessed employment, of each person in the Sacred Trinity.

The Father, as the source and fountain of all good, is, to all who seek him, a "God of grace, and of all consolation," "forgiving all their sins, healing all their spiritual maladies, redeeming their lives from destruction, and crowning them with mercy and loving-kindness."

The Lord Jesus Christ as our Great High-Priest, sprinkles his own precious blood on the soul of the repenting sinner, and "gives him beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

The Holy Spirit also will descend and dwell in the contrite soul, to revive and comfort it; with those also who are bowed down through manifold temptations, to support them with great might, and to make them victorious over all their enemies.

Indeed our Triune God assumes to himself that endearing name, "The God who comforts all those who are cast down, [2 Corinthians 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.6)." There is no tribulation so heavy, but he can make our consolations to abound above all our afflictions, [2 Corinthians 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.4-5). Behold Paul and Silas when in prison, their backs torn with scourges, and their feet made fast in the stocks; that was certainly to them a night of deep affliction. Yet, so far were they from being dejected, that "at midnight, with a loud voice, they sang praises to their God, insomuch that all who were in the prison heard them, [Acts 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.25)." And thus will God support all his afflicted people; he will cause "light to arise unto them in darkness," yes, and in the darkest night, "will himself be a light unto them."

But where besides, shall we find one who can do this? As for "the gods of the Heathen, they cannot do either good or evil;" and all the creatures in the universe are no better than "broken cisterns which can hold no water!" With God alone "is the fountain of life; and in his light alone shall we see light, [Psalm 36:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.9)."

Yet this consideration wholly insufficient to stir up their desires after God.

Though God would be a Father unto them, and treat them as his sons and daughters—they will not seek his face.

And though the Lord Jesus Christ would wash away their sins, and clothe them in the robe of his own unspotted righteousness—they will not follow after him.

And, though the Holy Spirit would accomplish in them the whole work of salvation—they will not implore his gracious influences.

The vanities of time and sense they will seek with avidity; but after God they will not inquire, nor will they use the appointed means to obtain his favor!

Now, what extreme folly is this! For however long their day of prosperity may be—there must come at last a night of affliction; since "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward!" But what will they do when the night shall arrive? To whom will they flee for support? Where will they find any solid consolation? Even "in the midst of their sufficiency, they are in straits;" and "in the midst of laughter, their heart is in heaviness."

What, then, will they do, when all created comforts shall vanish, and God himself shall frown upon them! What will they have to comfort them in a time of sickness? What will they do under the guilt of an accusing conscience, and under the apprehensions of God's impending wrath! What comforters will they find then? Who will brighten their prospects then? Whatever satisfactions they may have found in the day of prosperity, who will give them songs in the night of affliction?

Above all, who will console them under the loss of Heaven? Who will administer to them one drop of water to cool their tongue in Hell? Truly, the neglect of God, who is the only and the all-sufficient source of all good, is nothing short of madness itself! As it is said, "Madness is in their heart while they live; and, after that, they go to the dead! [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are yet in the sunshine of prosperity.

You, under your present circumstances, feel no need of God; and you can sing, as it were, all the day long. But will the night of affliction never come? Will the period never arrive when you shall say, 'Oh that I had God for my Friend! Oh that I had God for my Portion!' You cannot but know that this time must come; and that, if your day closes before the Sun of Righteousness has arisen upon you, it would have been better for you never to have been born.

Why, then, will you delay to seek the Lord?

Why will you not turn, and inquire early after God?

Why will you not be as wise for eternity as others are for the concerns of time?

You see people anxious enough to provide for their bodily wants; why will you not be careful for your souls?

Were God held forth to you only as a Governor and a Judge, you would need no further inducement to seek his favor; for you cannot but know that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

But when God is set forth to you under the endearing characters of a Father, a Savior, a Comforter—then how can you withstand his invitations to accept of mercy? Hear how he himself expostulates with you on your impiety and folly, "You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD: "Have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness? Why do my people say, 'We are free to roam; we will come to you no more'? [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31)."

Dear brethren, delay not any longer to turn unto your God; provoke him not utterly to depart from you, and to "swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest!" But "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon! [Isaiah 55:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.6-7)."

2. To those who are in the night-season of adversity.

Tell me, Beloved, whether, on a supposition that you have truly sought the Lord, you have not found him, "a very present help in the time of trouble?" Has he not been ready to hear your every prayer, and to supply your every need? Has not the light of his countenance been abundantly sufficient to turn all your sorrows into joy? Has he not enabled you even to "rejoice in tribulation," yes, and to "take pleasure" in the heaviest calamities, because of the augmented consolations and supports which they have been the means of bringing into your soul? 2 Corinthians 12:10. You, then, are witnesses for God, that he "gives songs in the night," and that he is worthy of all possible love and adoration and praise. This is the state in which the Lord's people should be.

When you can say, as his Church of old, "In the way of your judgments, O Lord, have we waited for you; the desire of our soul is to your name, and to the remembrance of you; with my soul have I desired you in the night; and with my spirit within me will I seek you early,"—then it is well with your soul. Whatever your outward circumstances may be, you are, and must be, happy; no increase of corn or wine or oil could put such gladness into your hearts as that which you experience in the light of your Redeemer's countenance!

Go on, then, and "let your light shine more and more unto the perfect day." And may "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ your Savior, and the love of God your Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit your Comforter," yes, may all the richest communications of our Triune God, be ever with you! Amen and Amen.

#488

THE SOURCE AND REMEDY OF DESPONDING FEARS

**[Job 35:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 35.14)**

"Although you say you shall not see him—yet judgment is before him; therefore trust in him."

In controversy there is need of the utmost fairness; nor can we ever hope for a favorable outcome without fairness. The friends of Job were grievously defective in it; and therefore utterly failed, either to convince him, or to be convinced themselves.

Elihu, who was an attentive auditor of the dispute, and who, on account of his youth, judged it indecorous to offer his opinions until he saw that his elders were silenced, took up the matter with incomparably better temper and judgment, and, instead of bringing railing and unfounded accusations as the others had done, called Job's attention to many expressions he had used, and endeavored to convince him out of his own mouth. This was wise, and well adapted to the end proposed; and it is observable, that when God reproved the manner in which the other three had conducted the controversy, he said nothing to the disparagement of Elihu, nor required any sacrifice on his account.

It is certain that Job, though far from being a hypocrite, as his friends had represented him, had not always spoken quite advisedly with his lips. His self-justification had been occasionally too strong, and his complaints of God's conduct towards him had been somewhat irreverent; he had yielded also too much to despondency. He had complained that he could not understand God's dealings with him, and that he had no hope or prospect of deliverance from his troubles, [Job 23:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.8-9).

This is noticed by Elihu in the words before us; and the proper remedy for such desponding fears is pointed out to him, "Although you say you shall not see him—yet judgment is before him; therefore trust in him." That is: place in God that confidence he deserves; and all will yet be well.

From the words thus explained, we shall be led to consider,

I. The **source** of desponding fears.

There is far more of despondency in men than is generally supposed. Perhaps despondency is, as much as any other thing whatever, a ground of their continuing impenitent in their sins.

The **ostensible** ground of men's fears is usually a sense of the extreme difficulty of their case.

Thus it was with Israel at the Red Sea, at the waters of Marah, at the borders of Canaan also, when the spies represented the cities as impregnable, and the inhabitants as irresistible. Thus it was even with the pious Hezekiah, when his sickness appeared to be unto death, [Isaiah 38:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.10-13).

And thus it is with multitudes among ourselves, who imagine that their circumstances are so calamitous, as to be beyond the reach of any remedy. More particularly is this the case with people under spiritual trouble—they are apt to imagine that their sins are unpardonable, and that their corruptions are too inveterate ever to be subdued.

The **real** ground for their despondency, is a low apprehension of the perfections of their God.

This is the interpretation which God himself puts on the unbelieving fears of his people. When Sarah laughed at the promise made to her, the answer was, "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" The complaint of God against the unbelieving Israelites was, that "they limited the Holy One of Israel." In fact, a just view of God's perfections would silence all fears; for if his wisdom, his power, his love, his faithfulness are really infinite—then we have nothing to do but to repose our confidence in him, and we are safe!

But it is a small thing to know the source of desponding fears, unless we apply,

II. The **remedy** for desponding fears.

This is prescribed in the words of our text:

1. Contemplate God.

What we are to understand by that expression, "Judgment is before him," may be ascertained by consulting a similar passage in the prophet Isaiah, [Isaiah 30:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.18). He will do nothing but what is right and good; nor will he omit anything which it befits him to do.

Consider what he has done in a way of power and grace; and is he not the same God as ever?

Consider what he has engaged to do: Is there anything that we can need, which is not made over to us by an express promise? Has he not said:  
that "his grace shall be sufficient for us;"  
that "we shall have no temptation without a way to escape;"  
that "as our day is, so shall our strength be;"  
that "he will give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing" from his believing people?  
  
"Has he then said these things, and will he not do them? Has he spoken, and will he not make them good?"

Consider, above all, the gift of his only dear Son! If so, then what else will he, or can he, withhold from us? "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32).""You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat! [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.4)."

Did we but duly consider his glorious perfections as already exercised for his people, and as specially pledged to be exercised for us—we would never entertain a doubt of his constant and effectual care. "His name would be to us as a strong tower, to which we should run and be safe."

2. Trust in him.

"Those who know his name will trust in him;" and to trust in him is the certain way to dissipate all fear. See how a confidence in God operated in the case of David, [Psalm 46:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-3); [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4); and the same effect will it produce in us, "if we commit our ways to him, our very thoughts" (which are by nature fluctuating as the wind) "shall be established."

This, then, is what we must do; we must "cast all our care on Him who cares for us." It is the very direction which God himself gives to "those who walk in darkness and have no light, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10);" and if we follow this direction, "God will keep us in perfect peace, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3);" and we shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but stands fast forever! [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who **overlook**their difficulties.

This is the habit of men in general; and hence it is that they are so much at their ease. But it is no easy matter to turn to God aright. To repent and to believe in Christ, are works far beyond the ability of man; nor can any man do either the one or the other, but by the influence of the Holy Spirit! [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31). [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29). O let this be duly weighed! Let us remember, that "we cannot even say that Jesus is the Lord," (that is, we cannot feelingly and believingly say it) "but by the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.3);" and let us not delay one hour to seek his effectual aid.

2. To those who **unduly magnify**their difficulties.

We certainly magnify our difficulties too much, when we deem them insuperable; for "the things that are impossible with man, are possible with God." See the state of Jonah in the whale's belly—could any condition be conceived more hopeless? Yet from thence did he cry; and his prayer entered into the ears of the Lord Almighty! [Jonah 2:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.1-7).

Just so, let us "never stagger at the promises of God through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)." The greater our difficulties, let our application to him be the more earnest, and our expectations of his gracious interposition be the more enlarged, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all you that hope in the Lord! [Psalm 31:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.24)."

#489

HYPOCRISY EXPOSED

**[Job 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.13)**

"The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath!"

Sufferings are to the soul what the furnace is to gold—they serve to ascertain the measure of its purity or its corruption. If under the pressure of them we humble ourselves before God, and correct whatever we may find to have been amiss—then afflictions will promote greater holiness of heart, and the honor of Him by whose gracious providence they are laid upon us. But, if we murmur at God's afflicting providence, and rebel against our Him—then our sufferings will betray an unsound and hypocritical heart.

As to the measure of temporal advantage that shall accrue to those who patiently endure the Lord's will, or to the temporal miseries that shall be sustained by hypocrites—we apprehend that Elihu, as well as the three friends of Job, was, though in a less measure than they, mistaken. But as to the eternal consequences of uprightness or hypocrisy, Elihu was perfectly correct, "The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath!"

This expression is deserving of the most attentive consideration. But so to delineate the hypocrisy of the heart, as neither to encourage an undue confidence by distinctions that are inadequate, nor to wound the feelings of the upright by too refined distinctions, is a work of great difficulty. We will however, in dependence on God's help, attempt it; and will proceed to describe,

I. The characters here mentioned.

The heart is the seat of both uprightness and hypocrisy:  
The upright are "the upright in heart."  
The hypocrites are "the hypocrites in heart."

Of those whose hypocrisy is gross and glaring, we shall forbear to speak of at present, except to point out two most extraordinary instances:  
Ishmael in [Jeremiah 41:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 41.2-7) (his weeping); and  
Johanan in [Jeremiah 42:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 42.1-6); [Jeremiah 42:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 42.20).

We will rather draw your attention to:

1. Those whose religion is **formal and ostentatious**.

The religion of many consists in an outward respect for certain forms, which, though not necessary in themselves, they think it expedient to observe, in order to maintain a reputation for piety, and to set a good example to the baser orders of the community. Different degrees of strictness obtain among them in relation to these things; some of a more zealous cast, say, as it were, "Come, and see my zeal for the Lord!" While others are contented with the round of duties, to satisfy their own consciences, and to enable them to say, "What more do I lack?" But in all this there is nothing of regard for God; it is hypocrisy altogether; and hence our blessed Lord, speaking of such characters, says, "You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draw near unto me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me! [Matthew 15:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-8). [Matthew 6:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.1-8)."

2. Those whose religion is **partial and temporary**.

Certain occasions sometimes arise to excite men to diligence in seeking after God; and, if the making of some particular sacrifices would suffice, they would willingly pay the price. But to "follow the Lord fully," to give up themselves to him without reserve, to "be steadfast and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the world"—this is more than they can consent to; and, when required to do these things, they, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel, renounce all hope in Christ, rather than forego the things to which their carnal hearts are more attached.

Under the pressure of some heavy affliction, they are like men in a storm; who will rather throw overboard their provisions and the tackling of the ship, than allow the ship to sink. But they do not cast out their sins on account of the hatred they bear to them, but only from an apprehension, that, if not cast away, their sins will operate to the destruction of their souls. But when the storm is over, they will be as ready as ever to return to their former sinful habits.

But all this argues an unsoundness of principle, and proceeds from hypocrisy in the heart. So the Scriptures uniformly declare, [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15); [Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.4); [Hosea 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.16). [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.16). [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-37).[Matthew 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.18). See especially [Job 27:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.8-10); and so it will assuredly be found in the last day [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23).

3. Those whose religion is **weak and ineffectual**.

The object of all religion is to renew and sanctify the soul; and if it does not produce this effect—then it is of no avail. The delivering us from gross immoralities is but half its work; it must purge the soul from all allowed evil, of whatever kind it be. If our religion does not prevail so as to to overcome our high thoughts of ourselves, [Habakkuk 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.4), and uncharitable censures of others, [Matthew 7:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.3-5); if it does not enable us to govern and control our tongues, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26), and indeed to rescue us from the dominion of every known sin—then we are under a delusion, and deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin! [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48).

It matters not how high our pretensions may have been, or how exalted our reputation; the mask will at last be taken from our face, and our punishment will be proportioned to the hypocrisy of our hearts, [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.4-7) with 33:14.

The stony-ground hearers are not saved by their transient joys; nor are the thorny-ground hearers accepted on account of their stinted fruits; those alone approve themselves truly upright, who bring forth fruit unto perfection, and "have respect unto all the commandments, [Matthew 13:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.19-23). [Psalm 119:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.6)."

Little are such characters aware, what is indeed,

II. Their melancholy employment.

Every sinner may properly be said to be "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5);" but this is more particularly the case with hypocrites; because,

1. Their sins are more heinous than those of others.

They are more insulting to the Majesty of God. The sins of all are heinous, inasmuch as they trample on the authority of God; but hypocrites pour contempt upon God! They say, in their hearts, 'Tush, God shall not see, "the thick clouds are a covering to him;" he cannot discern good from evil, but may be imposed on, like any of us.' But how offensive must such thoughts be to the heart-searching God! and how greatly must they aggravate the guilt of any sins committed by us!

They are also more injurious to the honor of God. Those who make no profession of religion may do what they will, and God is not dishonored any farther than as his authority is set at nothing; but when a man pretending to be religious manifests his hypocrisy, the world cries out against God himself, "blaspheming his holy name, [2 Samuel 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.14)," and calumniating his blessed Gospel, [2 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.2).

Sins of hypocrisy are also more destructive to our fellow-creatures. Sins committed by others, pass unheeded; but sins committed by hypocrites, are made stumbling-blocks to the whole world. It is surprising how the ungodly triumph on such occasions; 'There, there, so would we have it! they are all hypocrites alike; religion is only an empty name; and they are most honest and most to be depended on, who discard it altogether!'

Thus the sins of hypocrites are really more aggravated as to their guilt than others, and therefore they entail a heavier condemnation on those who commit them!

2. Their **best**actions, as well as their worst, only increase their guilt before God.

If they come into the house of God, and offer the most costly sacrifices, they still only heap up wrath against the day of wrath, [Proverbs 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.27). God abhors their very best services, [Isaiah 1:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-15), and accounts them no better than "the cutting off a dog's head, or offering him swine's blood [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3)."

Their most common actions also, which have no reference to religion, are hateful to him, "the very ploughing of the wicked is sin! [Proverbs 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.4)."

Thus wherever they are, and whatever they do, they are only swelling the number of their sins, and treasuring up for themselves a more accumulated load of misery to all eternity!

Unhappy people! they think, perhaps, or may even be confident, that all is well with them; while yet their one employment is to add sin to sin in this world, and misery to misery in the world to come! And hence the portion of hypocrites is represented as that which is more terrible than any that will be assigned to any other class of sinners whatever! [Matthew 24:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.51).

Inferences:

1. What great need there is for self-examination!

This is the improvement which God himself teaches us to make of this subject, [Galatians 6:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3-5). O search and try yourselves with all possible care. Knowing how deceitful the heart is, beg of God to "search and try it" for you, that you may "see if there be any wicked way in you, and may be led in the way everlasting! [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)."

2. How earnestly should we pray for the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit!

So did David in [Psalm 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.10); and so should we do. The old nature, however corrected, is corrupt still; we must be "created anew in Christ Jesus," and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds." To "take away the heart of stone, and to give us hearts of flesh," is God's work. O cry to him for it; and be not satisfied with "a name to live, while you are really dead" lest, like the Foolish Virgins in [Matthew 25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25), you be found destitute of that grace which can alone prepare you for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom.

3. How blessed are those who have experienced a saving work of grace in their souls!

These are accepted in all that they do; their prayers, their tears, their sighs, their groans, yes, their very thoughts—are all recorded in the book of God's remembrance, and shall be brought forth to augment the eternal weight of glory provided for them! [Psalm 15:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 15.1-2) with [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17).

You, then, who are cleaving with full purpose of heart unto the Lord, and striving really to glorify him in all things, rejoice in the prospects that are before you; and "keep your hearts with all diligence," that you may be found "Israelites indeed, in whom is no deceit," and "may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

#490

SIN OF REPROVING GOD

**[Job 40:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.1-2)**

The LORD said to Job: "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

Job's friends had failed of convincing his mind. And no wonder; for they adopted not any line of argument fitted to that end. Job was faulty, exceeding faulty, before God—though not in the way that his friends imagined. He had complained of God in very irreverent and unhallowed terms. He had complained of God as "multiplying his wounds without cause, [Job 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.17)." He had even condemned God as an oppressor, "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; show me why you contend with me. Is it good unto you that you should oppress, that you should despise the work of your hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked? You inquire after my iniquity, and search after my sin. You know I am not wicked, [Job 10:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.2-3); [Job 10:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.6-7)."

He even challenges God to a dispute respecting the equity of his own proceedings, not doubting but that if God will only give him permission to plead his own cause, without oppressing him by his power, he shall prove God himself to be in error concerning him, "Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me with your terrors. Then summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply. How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin! [Job 13:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.21-23)." In reply to all this, God takes up the cause; and, with an immediate reference to such expressions as I have already cited, he says, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

Now, as it may be thought that there are none at this day so presumptuous as to "accuse God," I will inquire,

I. Who are those who are liable to this charge?

As impious as such conduct is, there are multitudes who are guilty of it!

1. Those who dispute **God's Word**.

None but the truly humble either do or will receive the Word of God without challenging Him.

To some God's Word is too sublime, containing doctrines which human reason cannot comprehend.

To others it is too simple, offering salvation by faith alone, without any deeds of the Law.

To others, again, its precepts are too strict, requiring more than man would like to obey.

To others, on the other hand, its promises are too free, seeing that a man has nothing to do but to rest upon them, and they shall all be fulfilled to him.

But, of all people under Heaven, there are none who so systematically and openly blaspheme the Word of God as the Papists do.

They deny its sufficiency for the instruction of men in the way of life, and put on a footing of equality with it their own unwritten traditions.

And even its suitableness, also, do their deny; affirming that, if indiscriminately read by the laity, "it will do more harm than good." If the Scriptures are in any translation of the Protestants, they denounce it as "a deadly pasture, that will destroy the flock;" and as "the devil's gospel," which, whoever has "the presumption to read without the permission of the priest—he shall never receive absolution from the priest; and, as far as the priest can prevail, he shall perish forever under the guilt of all his sins! All this is affirmed by the present Pope, in his charge to all the Popish Bishops and Clergy throughout the world, given in 1824.

What is all this, but to "reprove God," and to say to him, "You have revealed your Word in away unsuitable to the necessities of your people, and unfit for their perusal?" This the priests declare, even respecting their own translations of the Bible; and they accordingly take the Bible out of the hands of the laity, and allow none to read it without their special permission. I marvel that there can be found upon the face of the whole earth people that will submit to such impious, such deadly, tyranny as this! But this whole Church shall answer for it, before long.

2. Those who arraign **God's providence**. Here again, will every man be found guilty before God.

It is a common thing to hear even people who bear the Christian name speaking of luck, and fortune, and chance—exactly as if there were no God in Heaven, or as if there were things beyond God's reach and control.

Just so, when afflictions are multiplied upon us, how commonly do we repine and murmur against God, instead of saying, as we ought, "The cup which my Father has given me—shall I not drink it?"

Perhaps it will be said, that our complaints are not so much made against God, as against those who are the immediate instruments of our affliction. But the creature, whoever he may be, is only a "rod," a "staff," a "sword," in Jehovah's hands! Though God leaves men to the unrestrained operation of their own corrupt hearts, he overrules everything they do for the accomplishment of his own sovereign will. Even the crucifixion of our blessed Lord was in accordance with God's determinate counsel and will!

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge, [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23)."

"They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen, [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28)."

As Moses, when the people murmured against him and Aaron, told them that their murmurings were in reality against God himself, [Exodus 16:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.7-8), so must I say, that murmuring of every kind, against whoever or whatever it is directed, is," in fact, a reproving of God himself, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor does so much as a hair fall from our heads.

3. Those who condemn **God's saving grace**.

The sovereignty of God, in the disposal of his saving grace, is more especially offensive to the proud heart of man. We arrogate to ourselves a right to dispense our favors to whoever we will; but we deny that right to God. Paul places this in a very striking point of view. God had said by the Prophet, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," Paul, then, arguing with a proud objector, replies, "What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" [Romans 9:13-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.13-21)."

Here is the very point both stated and answered. Man's proneness to call in question the saving grace of God is here affirmed, and is plainly declared to be a reproving of God himself.

Seeing, then, that so many are liable to the charge here exhibited, I will show,

II. What is meant by the warning here given them.

I have before noticed Job's challenge to Jehovah to answer him. Now God, in reply, bids the offender, if he can, to answer him. But there are only two ways in which any answer can be given; it must either be in a way of self-approving vindication, or in a way of self-abasing humiliation. Let the answer, then, be heard,

1. We must **not**answer God in a way of **self-approving vindication**.

To return such an answer as this, a man must maintain these three points:  
1. God is bound to consult me in what he does.  
2. I am competent to sit in judgment on God's proceedings.  
3. I know, better than God himself does, what befits him to do.

But who can maintain these points, and make them good against God? Who is puny man, to question that God from whom he derived his very existence, and who keeps him in existence every breath he draws!

As to judging of God's ways, as well might an ignorant peasant sit in judgment on the works of the greatest statesman or philosopher. Who among us would submit to have all his views and ways criticized by a child that has just learned to speak? Yet, that would be wise and commendable, in comparison with our presuming to sit in judgment upon God. When a candle can add to the light of the meridian sun—then may we hope to counsel God, how best to govern the world, and how most effectually to advance his own glory.

If, then, we cannot make good our own cause against God, then:

2. We must answer God in a way of **self-abasing humiliation**.

It was in this way that Job replied. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said: Behold, I am vile! What shall I answer you? I will lay my hand upon my mouth! Job 40 3, 4." So again, afterwards, "You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes! [Job 42:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.3); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

O brethren! this is the answer for every one of us to give; for "God will assuredly be justified in all that he has done, and will be clear when he is judged! [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4)." He will vindicate his own honor, and put to silence every proud objector.

Instead of questioning God, therefore, in the future, let this be the habit of our minds: let us, under all circumstances, maintain a humble trust in his goodness, and a meek submission to his will. This is our duty, our interest, our happiness. We expect as much as this from our own children; and shall we manifest less regard for God, than we, poor fallible creatures, exact from our own children? Let us lie as clay in the hands of our all-wise, all-gracious Potter, and leave him to perfect his work in his own way; having no concern in our minds, but to fulfill God's will and to glorify his name.

It was by a very circuitous route that God brought the Israelites to Canaan; but we are told, "He led them by the right way." And we, whatever trials we may meet with in this wilderness, shall, in the end, have the same reason to glorify our God as Job himself had, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11), and as all the saints have had from the beginning of the world!

#491

TRUE HUMILIATION

**[Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4)**

"Behold, I am vile!"

These are the words of a man whom God had pronounced "perfect and upright." As a fallen descendant of Adam, he partook of the corruption of our common nature; but as a child of God, he was one of the most eminent of all the human race. It may be thought, indeed, that this confession of his proved him to have been guilty of some enormous crime; but it evinced rather his great advancement in the divine life, and his utter abhorrence of all evil. Doubtless there was just occasion for this acknowledgment, because he had transgressed with his lips in arraigning the conduct of Providence towards him. And if they were suited to Job's case—then much more are they so to all those who possess not his holy attainments.

We shall consider the words as expressing:

I. A discovery then made.

Job had certainly humble views of himself upon the whole, [Job 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20); [Job 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-31); yet he had spoken in too unqualified terms in vindication of his own character, [Job 10:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.6-7); [Job 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 16.17). Instances of this Elihu had brought to his remembrance, [Job 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 32.2); [Job 33:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.8-12); [Job 35:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 35.2); and God himself testified against him in this respect, [Job 38:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 38.2); [Job 40:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2-8). Job had repeatedly expressed his wish that God would admit him, as it were, to a conference; and had expressed his confidence that he could maintain his cause before him Job, 23:1-5; [Job 31:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.35-37). But now that God did interpose, Job saw how much he had erred, and that all his former confidence was presumption.

1. Job saw that his **conduct** had been sinful.

Being conscious of the integrity of his heart, in relation to the things which his friends had laid to his charge—he had done right in maintaining his innocence before them. But he had erred in maintaining it to the extent he did; he had erred in imagining that he had not merited at God's hands the calamities inflicted on him; and, above all, in complaining of God as acting unjustly and cruelly towards him. These workings of his heart he now saw to be exceedingly sinful, as betraying too high thoughts of himself, and great irreverence towards the God of Heaven and earth, "in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly." This sin therefore he now bitterly bewailed.

2. Job saw that his whole **heart** was sinful.

He did not view his conduct as a mere insulated act; but took occasion, from the fruit which had been produced, to examine the root from which it sprang. He now traced the bitter waters to their fountain-head, and discovered thereby the bitterness of the spring from whence they flowed. This was altogether a new discovery to him; he had no conception how desperately wicked his heart was, and that the evils he had committed would have broke forth with ten thousand times greater violence, if they had not been restrained by the grace of God. The rebellion of which he had been guilty now proved indisputably to him, that he was of himself as prone to sin as any of the human race, and that, if he differed from the vilest of mankind, he had nothing to boast of, since he had not made himself to differ, nor did he possess anything which he had not received as the free gift of God! [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7).

This is the true way of estimating any individual sin, [Psalm 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.3); [Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.5). [Mark 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21); [Mark 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.23); and in this way alone shall we ever attain a just knowledge of ourselves.

But we must further view Job's words as expressing,

II. An acknowledgment of the truth then discovered.

"Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth spoke." Feeling his sinfulness, it was an ease, rather than a pain, to him to confess it before God and man.

1. Behold the **sincerity** of Job's confession.

Here were no excuses made, nor any suggestions offered to mitigate his guilt. He might have pleaded the weight of his sufferings, and the falseness of the accusations brought against him; but he saw that nothing can excuse sin; and that, whatever mitigations may be adduced to lessen sin's enormity in the sight of man, it is most hateful in the sight of God, and ought to abase us in the dust before him! That his sin on this occasion was an exception to his general conduct, did not at all change, in his estimation, the malignity of it; on the contrary, the enormity of it would appear in proportion to the mercies he had before received, and to the profession of piety he had before maintained.

Now thus it is that we also should acknowledge our vileness before God. Doubtless there may be circumstances which may greatly aggravate our transgressions; and these it will be at all times proper to notice; but it is never wise to look on the side that leads to a mitigation of sin. Self-love is so rooted in our hearts, that we shall always be in danger of forming too favorable a judgment of ourselves. The humiliation of the publican is that which at all times befits us; nor can we ever be in a more befitting state than when, with Job, we "repent and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes."

2. Behold the **dispositions** with which Job's confession was accompanied.

He submitted to reproof, and acknowledged himself guilty in relation to the very thing that was laid to his charge. This is a good test of true and genuine repentance. It is easy to acknowledge the sinfulness of our nature; but for a man, after long and strenuously maintaining his integrity, to confess his fault before the very people who have vehemently accused him, is no small attainment; yet Job did confess that he had repeatedly offended, both in justifying himself, and in condemning God. Moreover, he declared his resolution, with God's help, to offend no more, verse 5; and by this he manifested beyond a doubt the reality and depth of his repentance.

Of what use is that penitence that does not inspire us with a fixed purpose to sin no more? Humiliation without amendment is of no avail, "the repentance which is not to be repented of" produces such an indignation against sin, as will never leave us under the power of it anymore! [2 Corinthians 7:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10-11). May we all bear this in remembrance, and, by the radical change in our conduct, "approve ourselves in all things to be clear in this matter, [2 Corinthians 7:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10-11)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who entertain a good opinion of themselves.

How is it possible that you should be right? Are you better than Job, who is represented by the prophet as one of the most perfect characters that ever existed upon earth, [Ezekiel 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.14); [Ezekiel 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.20). Or if you were subjected to the same trials, would you endure them with more patience than he, of whom an Apostle speaks with admiration, saying, "You have heard of the patience of Job!" Know, then, that while you are indulging a self-righteous, self-complacent spirit, you betray an utter ignorance of your real state and character, and are altogether destitute of true repentance.

Moreover, to you the Gospel is of no avail; for, what do you need of a Physician when you are not sick? Or what need do you have of the Savior, when you are not lost? O put away from you your Laodicean pride, lest you be rejected by God with indignation and abhorrence! [Revelation 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17-18). But if, notwithstanding this warning, you are determined to hold fast your self-righteousness, then think whether "you will be strong in the day that God shall deal with you," or be able to stand before him as your Accuser and your Judge! Be assured, that if Job could not answer God in this world, much less will you be able to do it in the world to come.

2. To those who are humbled under a sense of their vileness.

We bless God if you have been brought with sincerity of heart to say, "Behold, I am vile!" If you feel your vileness as you ought, then all the promises of the Gospel will appear to you exactly suited to your state, and Christ will be truly precious to your souls!

Whom does he invite to come unto him, but the weary and heavy laden?

What was the end for which he died upon the cross? Was it not to save sinners, even the chief? "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst! [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)."

But while we would encourage all to come and wash away their sins in the fountain of Christ's blood, we would caution all against turning the grace of God into a license for sin. Many, in acknowledging the depravity of their nature, make it almost an excuse for their sins. Their acknowledgments may be strong; but they are attended with no tenderness of spirit, no deep contrition, no real self-loathing and self-abhorrence. Brethren, above all things guard against such a state as this. While you are ignorant of your vileness there is hope that your eyes may be opened to see it, and your heart be humbled under a sense of it. But to acknowledge your vileness and yet remain obdurate, is a fearful presage of final impenitence, and everlasting ruin! [Revelation 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.9); [Revelation 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.11); [Revelation 16:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.21).

If you would be right, you must stand equally remote from presumption and despondency. Your vileness must drive you, not from Christ, but to him; and when you are most confident of your acceptance with him, you must walk softly before him all the days of your life.

#492

THE EFFECT WHICH A SIGHT OF GOD PRODUCES

**[Job 42:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5-6)**

"I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!"

The deepest lessons of religion are usually taught to us in the school of adversity.

Affliction draws forth and reveals to us our latent corruptions.

These drive us with more abundant earnestness to God.

God takes these occasions to manifest his power and grace.

Thus we attain to a more enlarged and experimental knowledge of God.

This advances and improves us in every part of the divine life.

The history of Job remarkably exemplifies this observation; he was a godly man before his affliction, [Job 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.8), but too confident of his own integrity. But in his trouble God revealed himself to him more fully, and thus brought him to a better spirit, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!"

I. The discoveries of Himself which God sometimes makes to His more favored people.

There is a hearing of God, which, for lack of faith in the hearers, profits them nothing. But there is also a hearing which is really profitable. Such had Job's been; and such is that which multitudes experience under the Gospel. But there is a seeing of God which is very distinct from hearing. So Job experienced on this occasion.

There was not any visible appearance of God given to him; but surely he had views of the majesty, and power, and holiness of God, which he had never beheld before.

Such experience too have all his saints.

God does "manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world, [John 14:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.22-23)," and reveals himself more fully at some times than at others.

What else can be meant by that "anointing of the Holy One" which he grants to us, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27).

What else can be meant by the "Spirit of adoption, [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15)."

What else can be meant by the "witness of the Spirit, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16)."

What else can be meant by the "the sealing of the Spirit," which is a pledge "of our heavenly inheritance, [2 Corinthians 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.21-22). [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14)."

What can be meant by "the light of God's countenance lifted up upon us, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)"

What else can be meant his "love shed abroad in our hearts, [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5)."

These are blessings experienced by the saints in different degrees; and when given, are like the sun bursting forth from behind a cloud, or a veil being taken from before our own eyes! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). Then are we, like Moses, put in the cleft of a rock, and both hear his name proclaimed before us, and behold his goodness and his glory pass before our eyes! [Exodus 33:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.22-23); [Exodus 34:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.5-7).

In Job's instance before us we see,

II. The **effects** which those discoveries of Himself which God sometimes makes to His more favored people, will invariably produce upon them.

They will reveal to us our utter sinfulness.

Job was high in his own esteem before he saw God, [Job 27:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.5-6); [Job 31:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.6); but after he had seen God, his opinions were wholly changed! [Job 40:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4-5). Job expressly declares that his repentance was the result of the discovery afforded him, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!"

Thus was Peter's mind affected with a discovery of Christ's power, [Luke 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.8). We have a yet more remarkable instance of this effect in the prophet, [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5).

The experience of every Christian accords with this. Nothing shows us the aggravations of our sins so much, as a view of Him against whom they have been committed. Our contrition will ever be proportioned to our views of Christ! [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10).

They will cause us to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes.

While we know but little of God, we see but little of our own corruptions; but as we become more enlightened in our views of God—we learn to loath and abhor ourselves. Even Job, as holy as he was, found this effect from his views of God. Paul also, notwithstanding all his integrity, was brought to this by a sight of Christ, [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15). The same cause will produce the same effect in all! [Ezekiel 36:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26); [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31).

INFERENCES.

1. How do they err, who decry all manifestations of God to the soul!

Many think that divine manifestations are only the offspring of enthusiasm, and the parent of pride; but God does surely manifest himself to some as he does not to others, [John 14:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.22-23). Nor will such manifestations be allowed to puff us up with pride. The more holy a Christian is, the lower thoughts will he have of himself! [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8). Let the saints then be careful to cut off occasion for such calumnies, [1 Peter 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.16). Let them seek clearer views of Christ, as the means of abasing themselves more and more.

2. In what a wretched state are those who hear only in a customary manner!

Many there are of this description, [Matthew 13:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.14-15). They see themselves with self-righteousness and self-delight. But every living soul must be brought low before God, [Isaiah 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.11). God has established an invariable rule of procedure towards them, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6). We cannot address them better than in the pathetic language of Jeremiah, [Jeremiah 13:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.15-17).

3. How unspeakable a mercy do many find it, to have been afflicted!

The generality even of real Christians are prone to rest in small spiritual attainments; but God quickens them by means of temporal or spiritual afflictions. Through their troubles, they are brought to much humility and heavenly-mindedness; hence the most eminent saints have esteemed their troubles a ground of thankfulness. Let all therefore justify God in their troubles, and glorify him by submission. Let the afflicted be solicitous to have their trials sanctified, rather than removed.

4. What views shall we have of God in the eternal world!

The views with which the godly are sometimes favored in this world are inexpressibly bright and glorious. But what a sight of God will that be, when we shall behold him face to face! Surely all that we have heard or seen of God in this earthly state will be, in comparison with that, no more than a candle compared with the meridian sun. Let us willingly then endure the tribulations that are preparing us for Heaven.

#493

JOB'S RESTORATION TO HEALTH AND PROSPERITY

**[Job 42:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.10)**

"The Lord turned the captivity of Job and restored his fortunes, when he prayed for his friends; also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."

If God himself had not interposed to determine the controversy between Job and his friends, it would have been extremely difficult for us to decide with any precision the points at issue between them. There was much of wisdom and of piety on all sides; and on all sides there was somewhat also to blame. Perhaps we should have thought that the fault of uncharitableness was chiefly on the side of Job's opponents; but yet, as they were three in number, while he stood alone—he should have been ready to bow to their authority, and to consider the scale as preponderating in their favor.

However, happily for us, the difficulties are all removed by that infallible Umpire, to whom all the disputants appealed; and we are able to pronounce with certainty, that, both in temper and argument, Job had greatly the advantage of all his adversaries; nay, so far were they inferior to him in these respects, that they were commanded to request the intervention of his kind offices in their behalf, that through his intercession they might obtain pardon for their misconduct in the whole matter.

In compliance with this command, they entreated an interest in Job's prayers; a favor instantly conferred, and productive of the happiest effects, as well to him who prayed, as to them for whom his prayers were desired, "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends."

We shall conclude our remarks on the history and character of Job, by showing,

I. The intercessory office which Job performed.

The friends of Job had greatly offended God by their mode of conducting their controversy with him.

They imagined, that, while incriminating or condemning Job, they were rendering an acceptable service to God; but they were, in reality, only provoking the Divine displeasure. On the contrary, their injured friend was regarded by God with an eye of pity and of love. This is a very instructive circumstance. The *many* are not always right in their views; nor the confident in their assertions. The persecuted and afflicted saint whom they oppress, may be right in opposition to them all. It can scarcely be conceived how one false principle may warp the judgment even of good men; or to what erroneous conduct it may lead them.

We cannot, therefore, but impress on all the necessity of guarding against the baneful influence of prejudice or party zeal, and of maintaining in habitual exercise the united graces of humility and love. Charity in the heart is that which alone renders our most zealous services pleasing unto God; and, without it, whatever we may do or suffer for the Lord's sake, we are no better than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals! [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3).

For their ignorance and uncharitableness, God required them to humble themselves before him.

They were to bring their sacrifices, and to offer up burnt-offerings, in order to appease the wrath of their offended God; yes, they were also constrained to solicit the prayers of Job; nor would God pardon them, until his injured servant Job had interceded with him in their behalf.

Here, independent of the Mosaic law, the great doctrine of an atonement for sin was proclaimed; that doctrine which has been revealed with increasing clearness in all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, and which is the one hope and consolation of every man. The people who had transgressed were pious; and their sin was a sin of ignorance; yet they must present their burnt-offerings, in order to obtain mercy at the hands of God; from whence we may see, that not even the smallest sin, by whoever committed, can be pardoned, but through the blood of that all-sufficient sacrifice once offered upon Calvary; no penitence, no confession, no supplication will avail without that, "without shedding of blood there can be no remission [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22)."

Moreover the duty and efficacy of intercession are here inculcated. It was not only for the honor of Job, or for the humiliation of his friends, that they were obliged to solicit his intercession for them; it was the design of God to show that every man needed the intercession of the saints; end that He who had appointed his only-begotten Son to be the Advocate of his people at the throne of glory, would hear their mutual supplications for each other at the throne of grace.

This office Job most gladly undertook. Instead of feeling any resentment on account of the injury he had sustained, he was penetrated with an affectionate solicitude to avert from them the divine displeasure, and to bring down upon their souls a rich supply of all spiritual blessings. Whether Job officiated as their priest in offering the sacrifices, does not altogether appear; but as their intercessor, he succeeded far beyond his own most optimistic expectations.

In his execution of this office we are particularly led to notice,

II. The benefit resulting to Job himself from the discharge of his intercessory office.

A great and immediate change was wrought in Job's circumstances.

His bondage and misery had extended to his mind, and body, and estate; and in relation to them all "his captivity was turned."

His flesh, which had been covered with a most loathsome and painful disease, was healed, and became "fresher than a little child's."

His mind, which had been agitated even to distraction, became calm and peaceful."

His friends, who had all despised and forsaken him, united in making him such presents, as, through the peculiar blessing of God's providence, rendered him twice as rich as he had before been.

The same number of sons and daughters also were in due time given to him by God, and all such other blessings were added as tended to make him most happy in the enjoyment of them.

By this instantaneous change, God rendered more manifest His decision of the controversy.

Now it could no longer be doubted but that Job had been unjustly accused and unrighteously condemned. The friends of Job had been most unreasonable in the testimonies they demanded; yet God had far exceeded them all! [Job 8:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 8.6-7); [Job 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.22); [Job 22:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.25). No less than four times does God himself designate Job by that honorable title, "My servant Job;" thereby attesting in his behalf, that, whatever infirmity he had shown, he had indeed been upright before God, and had maintained a conscientious regard for God's honor.

Though we cannot infer from this, that God will always interpose for the comfort of his people in the same precise manner—yet we may be assured, that sooner or later he will vindicate the honor of his saints, and "make their righteousness to shine forth as the noon-day."

We need not, therefore, be cast down because of any present sufferings which we may be called to endure; for, if not in this world—yet certainly in the next, our meek submission to them shall be abundantly recompensed by our gracious God, "with whom it is a righteous thing to recompense tribulation to those who trouble us; and to us who are troubled, rest. [2 Thessalonians 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.6-7)."

By this instantaneous change, God put honor on a forgiving spirit.

The forgiveness of injuries done to us is required by God in order to his forgiveness of our iniquities, [Matthew 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.14-15); [Matthew 18:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.35). It may at first appear a hard command, "Bless those who curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you;" but who can behold the termination of Job's afflictions, and not see the blessedness of fulfilling that duty? Truly, whatever may be said of the sweetness of revenge, there is nothing so refreshing to the soul as to gain a victory over one's own spirit, and to exercise that disposition towards our brethren, which we ourselves hope to meet with in our offended God.

Improvement.

This subject very distinctly shows us,

1. The manner in which our sins are to be forgiven.

We do not agree with those who represent Job as a type of Christ; but in this part of his history we certainly behold the way of acceptance with Almighty God; it is through the sacrifice and intercession of that Great High Priest, who has been especially ordained by God to be our Advocate and Mediator. By putting our cause into the hands of our blessed Lord and Savior, we may all, even the vilest of the human race, obtain mercy with God; but there is no other way of coming unto God with even the smallest hope of mercy [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6). [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12). Let us bear this in mind, and not lose sight of it for one moment. Let us set before our eyes the conduct of Job's friends in relation to this matter, and instantly unite in following their example. If we are too proud to seek reconciliation with God in the way which he has appointed, we can expect nothing but that "he will deal with us after our folly."

2. The wisdom of waiting to see the **end** of God's dispensations.

Job, in the midst of his afflictions, accounted God his enemy; but not so when he saw the termination of them. Thus we, under our trials, are ready to say, "All these things are against me!" But in how many instances have we seen reason to be ashamed of our precipitancy and unbelief! In how many instances have we found our trials to be the richest blessings in disguise, and have been constrained to acknowledge them all as the fruits of God's fatherly love! Let us, then, wait for the outcome of our trials, before we presume to judge harshly of God on account of them. The history of Job was particularly intended to teach us this lesson, and to reconcile us to afflictive dispensations of whatever kind, "Behold, we count them happy that endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)." Thus let but the end of our troubles be seen, and we shall bless and adore our God for every trial we have ever endured.

3. The duty and efficacy of intercession.

To enter fully into the necessities of our fellow-creatures, and to spread them with earnestness before God in prayer, is no easy attainment. But, when this disposition is attained, and is put forth into lively exercise, it is replete with most incalculable benefit to the soul. Truly, if a person groaning under spiritual bondage himself, could stir up himself to make intercession for others, we believe that he would find no readier or more certain way to obtain deliverance for his own soul. At all events, to abound in this holy exercise is our duty, [1 Timothy 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.1); and we have all possible encouragement to perform it. The examples of Moses, [Numbers 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 12.13). [Deuteronomy 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.13-14); [Deuteronomy 9:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.18-20). [Deuteronomy 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.26); of Elisha, [James 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17-18)' and of the Church at Antioch, [Acts 12:5-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.5-17), are sufficient to warrant a firm expectation that our prayers, if offered in faith, shall not go forth in vain. We are not, however, left to gather this as an uncertain inference from former events; it is made the subject of a special promise to the saints in all ages, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much! [James 5:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.15-16)."

PSALMS

The Psalms, though in many parts historical, doctrinal, and preceptive, may yet be considered as differing materially from the rest of the inspired volume, inasmuch as, while other books of Scripture inculcate religion, these exemplify the operations of genuine religion on the heart.

#494

CHARACTERS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

**[Psalm 1:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.1-6)**

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish!"

The Psalms were chiefly, though not exclusively, written by David; some were written, one at least, many hundred years before him; and several many hundred years after him. It is supposed that Ezra reduced them to the order in which they stand. We are sure that, in the Apostle's days, the Second Psalm occupied the same place that it does now; because it is quoted by him as "the Second Psalm." The Psalms are quoted continually in the New Testament as inspired of God; and so fully do they speak of Christ, that an account of his life and death, his work and offices, might be compiled from them almost as clearly as from the Gospels themselves!

The Psalm before us seems properly placed, as a kind of preface to the whole; inasmuch as it contains a summary description of the righteous and the wicked, both in their character and end. We will consider,

I. The description of the godly.

We are not to expect in a composition of this kind a full and accurate delineation of men's characters, in the brief notices here given to us, we have what is abundantly sufficient to distinguish the saints from all other people upon the face of the earth.

1. The saints are here described **in plain terms**.

Two things we are told concerning them, namely:  
What COMPANYthe saints desire.

They have no pleasure in the society of ungodly men. They are aware that "Bad company corrupts good character;" and that the surest way to avoid infection, is to come as little as possible in contact with those who are diseased. They see how fatal, and yet how common, is the progress of sin; that to walk, however occasionally, in the counsel of the ungodly (who are destitute of any pious principle), is a prelude to standing in the way of sinners (gross, open sinners), and, at last, to sitting in the seat of the scornful, who despise and deride all true piety.

Hence, fearing lest, by unnecessarily associating with the wicked, they should be drawn to adopt their principles, and to imitate their conduct—they either withdraw from them altogether, or contract their fellowship with them, as much as will consist with a due discharge of their social and relative duties.

What EMPLOYMENT the saints delight in.

Privacy, and reading of the Holy Scriptures, are far more congenial with their feelings, than the noise and vanity of the world.

In the blessed Word of God they see all the wonders of redeeming love.

In the Word, they find the charter, by which they are entitled to an everlasting glorious inheritance.

There they behold thousands of exceeding great and precious promises, which are as marrow and fatness to their souls.

There also they see marked out to them the way in which to please, and honor, and glorify their God.

By meditating on these various precepts and promises, they find their souls cast, as it were, into the very mold of the Gospel, and gradually transformed into the image of God!

Hence they delight to ruminate on the Word of God. Yes, "day and night" they make it their meditation and their joy. Like Job, they "esteem it more than their necessary food!"

2. The saints are here described by **a beautiful comparison**.

In consequence of thus "shunning evil and cleaving unto that which is good," they become like a tree planted by the canals in Eastern countries, which flourishes with incessant verdure and fruitfulness, while all that are less favorably situated, are parched and withered by drought. The godly are "trees of righteousness, of the Lord's planting;" their roots are constantly watered by that "river which makes glad the city of God;" and by the fertilizing influences of the Spirit of God they bring forth in rich abundance "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God."

A vicissitude of spiritual seasons they surely experience; but never is their profession tarnished by openly visible decays, or by a lack of such fruits as the peculiar season calls for. On the contrary, the winds and storms, and heat and cold, all tend to further their stability and fruitfulness; insomuch that "whatever they do," or whatever is done to them, "they prosper! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)." See them in the diversified seasons of prosperity and adversity, they show by their conduct "whose they are," even Christ's, "of whose fullness they continually receive," and "of whom all their fruit is found."

In perfect contrast with this is,

II. The description of the ungodly.

Exceedingly pointed is that expression, "The ungodly are not so."

1. The ungodly are not so in their **character**.

The ungodly, instead of shunning the company of those who do not fear God, prefer it; and would far rather associate with an avowed infidel, or a notorious wicked man, than with one who was distinguished for the most exalted piety. They do not all proceed to the same extent of open profaneness; but all, without exception, "love darkness rather than light;" yes, "they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved!"

And as they prefer the society of those who know not God—so they prefer any other book, whether of science or amusement, before the sacred volume! They may study the Holy Scriptures indeed with a view to head-knowledge; but not with any desire to imbibe the spirit of them in their hearts, or to have their lives conformed to them.

In this there is an extremely broad line of distinction between the two characters:

To the godly the Scriptures are "sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb!"

But to the ungodly they are insipid, and are either not perused at all, or studied only for the purpose of exercising a critical acumen. There is nothing in the sacred volume that is suited to their taste. The wonders of redemption do not affect their minds; nor are the precepts of the Gospel palatable to their souls.

Would we but candidly examine ourselves by these two marks, we would soon discover to which of these parties we belong.

2. The ungodly are not so in their condition.

They have no part or lot in the "blessedness" of the saints.

To such a tree as has been before described, the ungodly bear no resemblance; their root is fixed in the world; their fruit is no other than "grapes of Sodom and clusters of Gomorrah."

But there is an appropriate comparison for them also, "they are like the chaff which the wind drives away." Truly, they are as light and worthless as chaff. No solid principle of piety is found in them; nor is there anything in their character which God approves. To a superficial observer they may appear like wheat; but the winnowing fan will soon discover how empty and unsubstantial they are. Or, if they continue mixed with the wheat in this world, the separation will speedily and infallibly take place in the world to come. The Judge of the living and dead will come, even He, of whom it is said, "His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire! [Matthew 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.12)." Among the wheat, not an atom of chaff will then be found; nor among the chaff, one grain of wheat! [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9). This, divested of metaphor, is plainly declared in the Psalm before us, "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, [Psalm 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.5)."

Ah! what an immense difference is here in the conditions of the two parties! the one approved of their God, and made partakers of everlasting felicity; the other, abhorred by God, and plunged into everlasting perdition! [Psalm 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.6).

ADDRESS.

1. To young people.

To you it appears but a small matter whom you choose for your associates. But, if you consider how much we are influenced by the opinions and examples of others, and what awful consequences will follow from the conduct we pursue—then we shall see the necessity of selecting those only for our friends, who, we have reason to believe, are the friends of God. Do not let the rank or talents of men, and still less their gaiety and dissipation, attract your regards; but let the piety of their hearts and the holiness of their lives, be their highest recommendation to your friendship. As our blessed Lord "was not of the world, so neither must you be;" but you must "come out from among them, and be separate," and choose for your companions "the excellent of the earth, and such as excel in virtue! [Proverbs 4:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.14-15). [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). [2 Corinthians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-17)."

2. To those who profess godliness.

It is not by mere speculative notions that you are to judge of your state—but by your spirit, your temper, your whole conduct and conversation. "The tree must be known by its fruit."

Now, as the ungodly form a perfect contrast with the godly, so let your spirit and conduct be a perfect contrast with theirs.

Are the ungodly following the course of this world, and minding only the things of the flesh? Let it be said of you, "They are not so;" "their conversation is in Heaven;" their delight is altogether in spiritual things; and "their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

In a word, endeavor to be as different from the ungodly world around you, as a verdant and fruitful tree is from one which is withered and dead; and know, that, if you are looking to the Lord Jesus Christ for fresh supplies of his Spirit and grace—then you shall receive from him such rich communications as shall be abundantly sufficient for you! [Hosea 14:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4-7).

#495

OPPOSITION TO CHRIST VAIN

**[Psalm 2:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-12)**

"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in Heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him!"

This Psalm, in its primary sense, relates to David; it declares the opposition which would be made to his establishment on the throne of Israel, and the final subjugation of all his enemies; both of which events took place according to this prediction, [2 Samuel 5:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.6-7); 2 Samuel 5:17 and [2 Samuel 8:1-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 8.1-15).

But beyond a doubt, one greater than David is here. There are several expressions in this Psalm which are not at all applicable to David, and which can pertain to none but the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Not even the highest angel could have that said of him, "You are my Son; this day have I begotten you, [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5);" and, as that august title was inapplicable to David, so it could never be said of him, that he had "the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." Moreover, when it is considered that the expression, "Kiss the Son," imported an act of divine worship; and that to "trust in" David would have been to give to a man the honor which was due to the Most High God alone, [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5)—it will be clear that the Psalm was intended to describe, not earthly, but heavenly things, even the reign of Messiah himself, "the Lord's Anointed." And of him the Jews, before the coming of Christ, interpreted this Psalm; as the modern Jews are constrained to acknowledge. Indeed it is manifest that the Apostles understood it in this sense; not only because immediately after the day of Pentecost they so interpret it, [Acts 4:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.25-27), but because in their controversy with the Jews they quote it in this sense, and argue upon it as accomplished in Christ's victory over death and the grave! [Acts 13:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.32-33). In reference to Christ, then, we will explain it, and show:

I. The opposition that is made to Christ.

Christ is still, as formerly, opposed by all ranks and orders of men.

No sooner was he born into the world, than Herod sought to destroy him. During his ministry upon earth the attempts made upon his life were very numerous; and it was only by repeated miracles that he was saved. When the time for his being delivered into the hand of sinners drew near, the whole Jewish nation, as it were, rose up against him, to put him to death. His resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, were calculated to rectify the mistaken apprehensions of his enemies, and to disarm their malice; but no sooner was his Gospel preached by his disciples, than the same opposition raged against them also, and every possible effort was made to suppress the rising sect. Not even death itself, in all its most tremendous forms, was deemed too severe a punishment for those who professed to believe in Christ. In this opposition all ranks and orders joined; the learned Scribes, the self-righteous Pharisees, the unbelieving Sadducees, all the highest orders both in Church and State, as well as the profane and licentious populace, were of one heart and mind in relation to this matter; those who agreed in no other thing under Heaven, agreed in this: a deadly hatred to Christ, and an inveterate opposition to his cause.

And is not the same phenomenon seen at this day? In this one point there is perfect unanimity, wherever we go. As Herod and Pontius Pilate, who were before at variance, united cordially with each other for the purpose of oppressing Christ—so now people who are most remote from each other in political and moral sentiment, or even in the general habits of their lives, all unite in decrying the Gospel as visionary in itself, and as injurious to the world. Let the Gospel be brought into any place, and this universal hatred to it immediately appears; nor can the Gospel be cordially embraced by any individual, without exciting in the minds of his friends and relatives a measure of indignation against him! [Matthew 10:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22-25); [Matthew 10:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-36).

This opposition to Christ is founded on an aversion to his strict and holy laws.

Had the Apostles brought forward the Gospel as a matter of opinion only, they would never have been so bitterly persecuted in every place. The Jews were ready enough, of themselves, to follow false Apostles and false Christs; and the Gentiles would have welcomed the inventors or advocates of any new philosophy. But it was the gospel that required of all people to submit entirely and unreservedly to the dominion of Christ, which irritated and inflamed the whole world against the preachers of Christianity.

Thus, at this time, if we only brought forward the great truths of the Gospel in a speculative and argumentative way, no man would be offended with us; (multitudes of preachers do this without exciting any hatred or contempt in the minds of their hearers;) but the practical exhibition of divine truth, the showing that all men must receive it at the peril of their souls, the insisting upon an entire surrender of their souls to Christ, to be washed in his blood, to be renewed by his grace, and to be employed for his glory—this is the offence. Qe are then too earnest, too strict, too enthusiastic, too alarming; we then are represented as "turning the world upside down," and are deemed little better than "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things!"

Nor will anything screen us from this odium; we may be as learned, as blameless, as benevolent, as active as Paul himself, and yet, if we have any measure of his fidelity, we shall be sure enough to have some measure also of his treatment from an ungodly world.

II. But the experience of all ages abundantly attests to the vanity of that opposition.

Notwithstanding all the exertions of his enemies, Christ was exalted.

It was "a vain thing that the people imagined," when they supposed that they could defeat the purposes of the Most High in relation to the establishment of his Son upon the throne of Israel. "He who sits in the heavens laughs at them, and has them in derision." In vain were the stone, the seal, the guard; at the appointed hour, Christ rose triumphant from the grave; and, on his ascension to the right hand of God, sent forth his Spirit to erect, in the hearts of men, that spiritual kingdom that shall never be moved, "Yet," says God, "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

As the purpose of Jehovah respecting the typical David was fulfilled in due season, so was that "decree which Jehovah had declared" respecting "his anointed Son." "The word grew and multiplied" in every place; and "the stone that had been cut out of the mountain without hands, broke in pieces" all adverse powers, and filled the whole Roman empire! [Daniel 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.34-35). The opposition raised by the Jewish nation against the Lord and his Christ, terminated only in the confusion of the opponents, on whom "the wrath of God" soon fell, and who are to this hour the most awful monuments of "his displeasure."

In due time, his exaltation shall be complete.

God having, in the resurrection of Christ, borne witness to him as his only-begotten Son, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4), has engaged, in answer to his requests, to "give him the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." And this he is gradually accomplishing; in every quarter of the globe is the Redeemer's kingdom extending on the right hand and on the left; and though there is very much land still unsubdued before him—yet shall he "go on conquering and to conquer," "until every enemy is put under his feet."

The enmity of the human heart, indeed, will still vent itself against him; but all who will not bow to the scepter of his grace, "shall be broken in pieces like a potter's vessel!" Whether we look to the world at large, or to any particular individual in the world, the final outcome of the contest will be the same; Christ must prevail, and "all his enemies shall become his footstool! [Matthew 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.44)."

Let us then contemplate,

III. Our duty with respect to Christ.

If He is "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords," then:

Our duty is to submit to Christ and serve him.

A "holy reverential fear" befits us in his presence, "He is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence by all those who are round about him." Our reverential fear of him should swallow up every other fear, and annihilate every desire that is contrary to his will. An external conformity to his laws will not suffice; he should reign in our hearts, and our "every thought should be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Not that our fear should be of a slavish kind; it is our privilege, and even our duty, to rejoice in him, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3); [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4); yes, we should rejoice in him with most exalted joy, even "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

Yet our joy should be tempered with humility, and our confidence with contrition. We should never so contemplate him as to forget ourselves, nor ever so triumph in him as to lose a jealousy over ourselves; we should "rejoice in the Lord always;" but still we should so temper this heavenly feeling as to "rejoice with trembling."

With this reverential fear, we should also maintain a devout affection towards him. Idolaters were accustomed to kiss their idols, in token of their entire and affectionate devotion to them, [1 Kings 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.18). [Hosea 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.2). Hence it is said, "Kiss the Son," that is, let us consecrate ourselves to his service affectionately and with our whole hearts. A constrained service is altogether unacceptable to him; obedience would lose all its worth, if we accounted his yoke heavy or "his commandments grievous." His law should be in our hearts, and a conformity to it should be our supreme desire and delight.

Submission to Christ is the duty of all, without exception.

It is a common sentiment that religion is only for the poor, and that the rich and learned are in a good measure exempt from its restraints. But in the sight of God all men are on a level: all are equally dependent on him; all must give up an account to him; and "kings or judges of the earth" are quite as much subject to the command of Christ as the basest of the human race. O let this awful delusion be banished! Let none imagine that a superiority of rank or station at all lessens their responsibility to God, or absolves them from the smallest measure of obedience to Christ.

Submission to Christ is also our truest wisdom.

If we say to any, "Serve the Lord," we say, in effect, "Be wise;" for "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom." Those alone who have never tasted of true piety, deride it as folly; and they only do it, because they do not like to confess their own folly in neglecting it; in their serious moments, and when their conscience is permitted to speak, the very despisers of godliness are constrained to say in their hearts, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

Moreover, submission to Christ is the only true path of happiness.

For what happiness can they have who are liable to the wrath of God? "If his wrath be kindled, yes, but a little"—can they endure the thought of meeting his displeasure? "Are they stronger than he," that they can feel themselves at ease, when they "have provoked him to jealousy?" No! The most careless of mankind, if he reflects at all, must be sensible that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We say then, "How blessed are all who put their trust in Him!" [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12)

They shall be protected by His power.

They shall be preserved by His grace.

They shall be enriched by His bounty.

They shall be blessed by Him with all spiritual blessings.

And in the last day, they shall be seated with Him on His throne, and be partakers of His glory for evermore!

#496

REGARD TO CHRIST ENFORCED

**[Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12)**

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

To so great a degree do the Psalms abound with prophecies relating to Christ, that all the most important circumstances of his life and death, his resurrection and glory—might be narrated from them with almost as much precision as in the Gospels themselves.

The Psalm before us has but a partial reference to David. It may be considered indeed as a triumphant proclamation of his establishment on his throne, notwithstanding all the opposition that had been made to him by Saul and by the Jews themselves.

But this Psalm principally points to the exaltation of Jesus to his throne of glory; and it concludes with an address to all the monarchs of the earth to submit themselves to his government.

In considering the words of the text, we shall call your attention to,

I. The command.

Who "the Son" is, we are at no loss to determine; since an inspired commentator has expressly declared him to be Christ. Compare verse 7 with [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5).

By "kissing" the Son, we are to understand

1. By "kissing the Son," we are to understand **submission to Christ's authority**.

Samuel having anointed Saul to be king of Israel, kissed him, in token of his submission to the power that was now vested in him, 1 Samuel 10:1. Now Jesus is "seated as King upon God's holy hill in Zion, verse 6;" and he demands that all should acknowledge him as their supreme Lord and only Savior. Compare [Isaiah 45:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23-24) with [Romans 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.11). His yoke in every view is hateful to us by nature; but most of all are we averse to "submit to his righteousness, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3)." But this we must do, renouncing every other ground of dependence, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9), and trusting in him as "The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)."

2. By "kissing the Son," we are to understand **love to Christ**.

When Mary desired to express her love to Jesus, she "kissed his feet [Luke 7:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.38);" and we also must feel in our hearts, and express, in every possible way, a fervent attachment to him. The characteristic mark of his disciples is, to "love him in sincerity, [Ephesians 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.24)." Destitute of this mark, we have nothing to expect but speedy and everlasting destruction! [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22). We must therefore account him precious to our souls, [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7), yes, "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely!" We must delight ourselves in contemplating his beauty, and maintaining fellowship with him, 1 [John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.3).

3. By "kissing the Son," we are to understand **devotion to Christ's service**.

Idolaters used, in worshiping their gods, to kiss their images, [Hosea 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.2). [1 Kings 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.18), or to kiss their hands in token of their devout regard to them, [Job 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.20); [Job 31:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.27).

In this sense also we are to "kiss the Son," exercising the same faith in him that we do in the Most High God, [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6). [John 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.1), and honoring him in every respect as we honor the Father, [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23); To kiss him, like Judas, and betray him—will fearfully aggravate our condemnation.

The vast importance of this injunction will appear, if we consider,

II. The arguments with which this command is enforced.

And here we notice,

1. The danger of disobeying this command.

As gracious and loving as the Savior is, he is susceptible to anger on just occasions, and feels a holy indignation against those who slight his love. And "if once his wrath be kindled, yes, but a little," it will utterly destroy us! [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.15-17). It will be but little consolation for us to see others suffering under God's heavier displeasure; the person who feels the smallest portion of his wrath in Hell, will be inexpressibly and eternally miserable; and therefore it befits us to offer him the sincerest tribute of our affection without delay. Nothing but this can prevent our ruin. In whatever "way" we are walking, we shall eternally perish if we do not embrace him with the arms of faith, and "cleave to him with full purpose of heart, [Acts 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.23)."

2. The benefit arising from obedience to this command.

What was before metaphorically represented by "kissing the Son," is here more simply expressed by "trusting in him." In fact, a cordial and entire confidence in him, as "our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," comprehends all the duties which we are capable of performing towards him in this world.

A saving trust in Christ renders a man inconceivably blessed!

It brings peace into his soul.

It obtains for him the forgiveness of all his sins.

It secures "grace sufficient for him," and "strength according to his day."

It makes him "blessed" in every state: in health or sickness, in wealth or poverty, in life or death.

It entitles him to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance in Heaven.

No person who ever possessed sincere trust in Christ, ever perished.

Glory and honor and immortality are the portion of "all who trust in Christ."

Whatever may have been their past conduct, or however they may doubt their own acceptance with God, they "are" blessed, and shall be blessed for evermore!

APPLICATION.

Here then is the direction which in God's name we give to all, "Kiss the Son." If you have any desire to escape the wrath to come, or to lay hold on eternal life, this is the sure, the only way of attaining your end. Neglect Christ; and, whatever else you either have or do, it will avail you nothing; you must "perish" everlastingly [Luke 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.24) and [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36). Love the Lord Jesus Christ, and give yourselves up unto him; and, notwithstanding your past sins, or present infirmities, "you shall never perish, but shall have everlasting life! [John 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.15-16)."

#497

THE PRIVILEGES OF THE GODLY

**[Psalm 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.3)**

"Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him."

Christianity has in all ages been an object of derision to an ungodly world. There never have been lacking those who resembled Cain and Ishmael, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29). God however has far other thoughts of those who serve him; the recollection of this is a comfort to the godly under their persecutions; the consideration of it too might be of great advantage to the ungodly. The Psalmist seems to be reproving the wicked for their contempt of God, and their injurious treatment of his people; he therefore, in a way of triumphant exultation, suggests the thought in the text.

I. Who are the special objects of God's favor?

The world is divided into only two kinds of men—the godly, and the ungodly.

The godly are to be distinguished from the ungodly, by a great variety of marks:

The godly **fear God**.

The generality of people sin without any shame or remorse, [Ephesians 4:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.18-19). But the godly can no longer proceed in such an evil course, [1 Peter 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.2-3).

They humble themselves before God for their past offences.

They guard against sinning against Him, even in thought! 2 Corinthians 10:5.

The godly **love God**.

They are not actuated by a merely slavish fear.

They have the Spirit of adoption given to them, [Galatians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.5).

They sincerely delight to do their Father's will, [Romans 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22).

They account the enjoyment of His favor to be their highest happiness, [Psalm 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6-7).

The godly **serve God**.

Their religion does not consist in mere ineffectual feelings.

It is obvious to all that they are God's servants.

They perform even their civil and social duties with a reference to God, [Romans 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.5-6).

They do everything with a view to God's glory, [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31).

What are the special honors which God confers upon the godly?

God has "set them apart," as distinct from those who perish.

He has set the godly apart **secretly**, in His eternal purpose.

His regard for them did not commence after they became godly. Their godliness is the fruit of His love to them, and not the cause of His love! [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3), [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9), [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4), and [Romans 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29-30). He loved them, and set His heart upon them, from eternity past!

He has also set the godly apart **openly**, when He effectually calls them by His grace.

In time, God effectually calls and converts all whom He chose in eternity past. He inclines and enables them to come out from the world, [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17-18). He causes them to devote themselves to his service, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9).

He has also set the godly apart, for Himself.

He makes their souls His own habitation, [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16).

He sheds abroad His love in their hearts by His Holy Spirit.

He preserves them as living monuments of His power and grace.

He regards them as His own treasured possession, [Psalm 135:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 135.4).

"Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself!"

"You are:  
 a chosen people,  
 a royal priesthood,  
 a holy nation,  
 a people belonging to God,  
that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)

This being a point wherein all are deeply interested, we shall,

III. Commend the subject to your solemn attention.

This is not a matter of doubtful disputation.

In every period of the world, God has had a chosen people. They have been distinguished with special tokens of his love:

Abel, [Genesis 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4).

Enoch, Noah, etc. [Hebrews 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.5); [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7).

Paul, [Acts 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.15).

And though they were not chosen for their holiness (for they had no holiness in themselves, but "were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest!" [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3).) Each of God's chosen people have invariably been made holy when they were saved. Moreover, when they were holy, God delighted in them as holy! [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4).

Nor is it a matter of trifling concern.

The Psalmist evidently speaks of it as deserving deep attention; and if it related only to this present state, it would be worthy of notice. But the present separation of God's people for himself, is a pledge of a future separation. In the day of judgment, God will complete the eternal separation which he here began, [Matthew 25:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.32-33). What distinguished honor will he then confer upon the godly! [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17). Then he will be their joy, and they his glory, forever! [Revelation 22:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.3-4).

Let the ungodly therefore know this, to their shame.

The Psalmist suggests the thought peculiarly in this view; and well may they be ashamed who despise what God loves. In vain do any hope to be God's people in Heaven, who are now the devil's people on earth. Let the ungodly therefore be ashamed of their false confidences. Let them set themselves apart for God, if they would have God set them apart for himself. Let them learn to live the life of the righteous, if they would die the death of the righteous!

But let the godly know it, to their unspeakable consolation.

Those who are beloved of God, have little reason to regard the contempt of men. God would have them assured of his superintending care. He would have them know their security, who take him for their God, [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31). Let the godly then rejoice in the honor conferred upon them. Let them look forward with joy to the final completion of God's gracious purposes towards them, and let them devote themselves more than ever to his service!

#498

A PRACTICAL EXHORTATION

**[Psalm 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.4-5)**

"Stand in awe, and do not sin. Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD."

In the Psalms of David there is a great diversity:  
some being expressive of his own experience, and abounding in petitions or thanksgivings, as the occasion required;  
others being simply historical, for the information of the Church;  
others prophetic of Christ and his kingdom in the world;  
and others again being merely instructive, for the benefit of mankind.

Of this last kind is the Psalm before us; in which, after declaring the comfort he had found in God, and offering a petition for the continuance of it (verse 1), he reproves those who derided religion, and sought happiness in the world (verse 2). He assures them, that God is the friend and portion of all who seek him (verse 3); and recommends them to seek him in a befitting manner (verses 4-5); and from his own experience attests, that no increase of worldly prosperity can ever afford them so rich a recompense as His presence (verses 6-7), in which all who enjoy it find perfect rest (verse 8).

As there is no certainty respecting the occasion on which it was written, we may take the text in a general view, and found upon it a general exhortation. Nor will there be any occasion for an artificial arrangement of it, because the different parts of the exhortation lie in an easy and natural order, and may be most profitably noticed as they arise in the text.

Beware, then, of sin! Or, as the text expresses it, "Stand in awe, and sin not".

Certainly sin ought to be an object of extreme fear and dread; we can never "stand in awe" of it too much.

See the devastation which sin has done in the world, how it has deformed the whole face of nature, and more especially the soul of man, which was originally made in the image of God himself!

See what was necessary for the expiation of sin! Could nothing but the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son make an atonement for it—and shall it appear a light matter in our eyes? Go and take a new of the Savior in Gethsemane and on the cross; and then say, whether sin is not a formidable evil!

Or go down to the regions of Hell where myriads of our unhappy fellow-creatures are suffering the penalty due to their sin, and then announce to us your opinions respecting it.

One glimpse of sin, in its true character, would be abundantly sufficient to convince you that death, in its most terrific shapes, has no terror in comparison with sin!

How, then, should you "stand in awe of it," even when presented to you in its most flattering dress! What if men tell you that it is harmless, and will bring no painful consequences with it? Will you listen to their delusions? Will you, through fear of their derision, or from a hope of their favor—give way to sin, and subject yourselves thereby to the wrath of an offended God? O! sin not, either in a way of commission, or of omission! And if a fiery furnace, or a den of lions, be set before you as the only alternative with sin—then do not hesitate to choose death in its most tremendous forms, rather than accept deliverance on the condition of committing any willful transgression!

That you may not be unwittingly offending God, be careful to live in habits of daily self-examination.

"Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still." People, at the moment that they are acting, are not always able to form a correct estimate of their conduct; they are blinded by self-love, and deceived by a partial view of the things in which they are engaged; and often find, on reflection, that they have reason to be ashamed of actions which, at the time of doing them, they conceived to be right.

Not only did Paul, in his unconverted state, err, when "he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus," but all the Apostles of our Lord erred in matters which, at the time, appeared to them to be highly commendable.

Who can doubt but that Peter, when he dissuaded his Lord from submitting to his approaching sufferings, and when he cut off the ear of Malchus, took to himself credit for his zeal and love? And that afterwards, when accommodating himself to the wishes of his Jewish brethren, in requiring from the Gentiles the observance of the Law, he supposed himself to be actuated by a condescending regard to the prejudices of his less-instructed brethren? Yet, on all these occasions he acted a part most displeasing to God, and was no other than an agent of the devil himself!

In like manner, when James and John would have called fire from Heaven, to consume a Samaritan village, they "little knew what spirit they were of." And all the Apostles, when they joined with Judas in condemning the extravagance of her who poured a box of ointment on their Master's feet, imagined that their regard for the poor was highly seasonable and praiseworthy.

And at is probable that Thomas, too, considered his pertinacity, in requiring more substantial proofs of his Lord's resurrection, far preferable to the less cautious credulity of his fellow Apostles.

Thus it is, more or less, with all of us. We need reflection; we need instruction; we need to have the film removed from our eyes; we need a more thorough knowledge of the motives and principles by which we are actuated. Things may be substantially right—yet wrong in the time and manner in which they are carried into effect. Or they may be essentially wrong, and yet, through the blindness of our minds, appear to us highly commendable.

This is particularly the case with many who spend their time in doing things which do not belong to them, while they overlook and neglect the duties which are proper to their calling. We are not to set one table of the Law against the other; or to trample upon acknowledged duties for the purpose of augmenting what we may imagine to be our religious advantages.

Doubtless, where unreasonable men reduce us to the alternative of offending God or man, we must make our stand against the usurped authority, and be content to bear the consequences; but if we were more willing to exercise self-denial for the Lord's sake, we would find that the path of duty would in many instances be more clear, and that we should on many occasions have less ground for self-reproach.

Let us, then, at the close of every day, honestly review the events in which we have been engaged, and the dispositions we have exercised; and, not content with examining ourselves, let us beg of God to search and try us, and to show us whatever there has been in our conduct that was sinful, or erroneous, or defective; so that we may be humbled for the past, and be more observant of our duty for the future.

Yet must we not so lean to the side of contemplation as to become remiss in action.

We are to "offer," and that with ever-increasing diligence, "the sacrifices of righteousness." We are all "a holy priesthood, who are to offer up spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Under the Law, there was a great variety of sacrifices; some for humiliation and others for thanksgiving. But, under the Gospel, everything becomes a sacrifice, when it is done for God, and presented to him in the name of his dear Son.

Doubtless the first offering which we are to present to God is our own heart! [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5). Without that, no other sacrifice can come up with acceptance before him. But, when we have presented ourselves to him as "a living sacrifice, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)," there is not any service which we can offer, which will not be pleasing in his sight. Let us then abound in every good work, and seek to "be filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

The duties of the closet demand our attention in the first place; for, if they be neglected, nothing can go well; the soul will be left to its own resources, and will of necessity fall a prey to sin and Satan.

Then come the duties of our place and station, whether in social or civil life. To neglect these, is to sin grievously against God, and to bring great disgrace upon religion. Every person in the family has his proper office, which he is bound to fill, not from necessity only, but for the honor of his God. While the husband is engaged in his proper labor, the wife is to be superintending the concerns of her family; and is to be discharging her duties with care and diligence.

The time that can be spared from these more appropriate, avocations may well be devoted to the service of the public, in any line that may be thought most conducive to the welfare of mankind. But it is possible for men to be so engaged in cultivating the vineyards of others, as to neglect their own. And this, in the present day especially, when so much time is consecrated to the maintenance of religious or benevolent societies, is a danger to which many are exposed. Care must be taken that none who are entitled to our services be neglected; and that, while some rejoice in what we do, none have reason to complain of what we leave undone. The public assemblies, too, must not be neglected; they are the appointed means of honoring God, and of bringing his blessing on our own souls. In a word, our duties both to God and man are to be harmoniously and diligently performed; and it must be the labor of all, according to their respective abilities, to "abound in every good word and work."

But, in whatever way our own efforts are directed, we must "put our trust in the Lord".

It is to his grace alone that we must be indebted for strength.

It is to his mercy must we look for acceptance before him.

It is on his truth and faithfulness must we rely for our ultimate reward.

Of ourselves we can do nothing. In vain will be all our efforts to escape from sin, or to fulfill our duty, if God does not "strengthen us with might by his Spirit in our inward man."

We must look to God to "work all our works in us;" "all our fresh springs must be in him." To rely simply on God is the only way of being really strong; as the Apostle says, "When I am weak, then I am strong;" and the more entire our reliance is on him, the more will his strength be perfected in our weakness.

At the same time, we must bear in mind how exceedingly defective our best services are; and must renounce all hope in "our own righteousness, as being in itself no better than filthy rags." If Paul, with all his transcendent excellencies, "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is from God by faith in Christ," much more must we do so, whose righteousness falls so far short of his. Our constant and grateful acknowledgment must be, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength." Yes, "in the Lord must all the seed of Israel be justified, and in him alone must they glory."

Yet we must not imagine that our services shall go unrewarded; for, though our works shall not go before us to Heaven, to supersede the office of a Savior, "they shall follow us, to attest our love to him, and shall be acknowledged by him as worthy of a gracious recompense." Not even a cup of cold water given to one of his disciples shall lose its reward. God would even consider himself as "unrighteous, if he were to forget our works and labors of love, which we have showed towards his name." Be assured, therefore, that he will bring forth, at the last day, whatever you have done for him, and will both acclaim and recompense it before the assembled universe.

Here, then, you have abundant encouragement to exercise yourselves with all diligence in the preceding duties of fear and vigilance, of piety and trust. And know, that the more you endeavor to approve yourselves to God, the more shall you be approved by him in the day of judgment.

#499

GOD'S FAVOR THE ONLY SUBSTANTIAL GOOD

**[Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)**

"Many are asking, 'Who will show us any good?'

 Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD."

Self-sufficiency pertains to God alone—he alone is not dependent on any other person or thing or circumstance for his own happiness. The creature must of necessity be dependent, and must derive its happiness from some other source outside of himself. The angels around the throne are blessed only in the fruition of their God. Man, of course, is subject to the same necessity of seeking happiness in something extraneous to himself; but sadly, through:  
 the blindness of his understanding,  
 the perverseness of his will,  
 and the corruptness of his affections  
—he seeks happiness in the creature rather than in the Creator. Hence the universal inquiry spoken of in our text, "Who will show us any good?" But there are some whose minds are enlightened, and whose desires center in their proper object; and who, in answer to the proposed inquiry, reply, "Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD!"

To illustrate the wisdom of their choice, we will consider more at large,

I. The world's inquiry.

A desire for happiness being natural, this inquiry is of necessity universal.

From infancy to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age, the inquiry is continued: Who will show us any good? Who will show us anything wherein our minds may repose, and find the largest measure of satisfaction? Agreeably to this universal sentiment, all prosecute the same object, in the ways wherein they think themselves most likely to attain it.

The merchant seeks it in his business, and hopes that in due time he shall find it in the acquisition of wealth.

The soldier looks for it in the laurels of victory, the acquisition of rank, and the applause of men.

The traveler searches for it in foreign lands, in expectation that he shall possess it in an expansion of mind, and in those elegant acquirements, which shall render him the admiration of the circle in which he moves.

The politician conceives he shall find it in the possession of power, the exertion of influence, and the success of his plans.

The philosopher imagines that it must surely be found in his diversified and laborious researches.

The religious devotee follows after it with confidence in cloistered seclusion, in religious contemplation, and in the observance of ceremonies of man's invention.

Others pursue a widely different course.

The voluptuary follows after his object in a way of sensual gratification, and in the unrestrained indulgence of all his appetites.

The gambler desires the excitement of his feelings in another way; and hopes, that, in the exultation arising from successful chance, and from sudden gain—he shall enjoy the happiness which his soul pants after.

The miser, on the other hand, will neither risk, nor spend more than he can avoid; but seeks his good in an accumulation of riches, and a conceit that he possesses what shall abundantly suffice for the supply of all his future needs.

We might pursue the subject through all the different departments of life; but sufficient has been said to show that all are inquiring after good.

It is indeed true, that many seek their happiness in evil, as the drunkard, the robber, and all other transgressors of God's laws. But no man seeks evil as evil; he seeks it under the idea of good, and from the expectation that the evil things which he does will, on the whole, most contribute to his happiness.

This inquiry after happiness is in itself commendable, and proper to be indulged.

The brute creation are directed by instinct to things which are conducive to their welfare; but man must have his pursuits regulated by the wisdom and experience of others, to whom therefore he must look up for instruction. But it is much to be regretted that the generality inquire rather of the ignorant than of the well-instructed, and follow their passions rather than their reason. If men would but go to the Holy Scriptures, and take counsel from God, they would soon have their views rectified, and their paths directed into the way of peace.

To such inquiries we proceed to state,

II. The believer's answer.

The believer's answer comes not from his head merely, but from his heart. There he has a fixed and rooted principle which tells him, that true happiness is to be found in God alone; so that, despising in comparison all other objects, he says, "Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD!" "In your favor is life," and "your loving-kindness is better to me than life itself."

That a sense of the Divine favor is the best and greatest good, will appear from the following considerations:

1. A sense of being in God's favor, gives a zest to all other good.

Let a man possess all that the world can bestow:  
 the greatest opulence,  
 the highest honors,  
 the kindest friends,  
 the dearest family,  
his happiness will after all be very contracted, if he does not also have the light of God's countenance lifted up upon him. But let him be favored with the Divine presence, and he will taste, not the comfort merely that is in the creature, but God's love in the creature. This will be like the sun shining on beautiful scenery, every object of which receives a ten-fold beauty from his rays; while the spectator himself, revived with its cheering influence, has his enjoyment of them exceedingly enhanced.

Here David, amidst all his elevation to dignity and power, found his happiness, [Psalm 21:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.1-6); and here alone, whatever else we may enjoy, can it be truly found, Psalm 144; in the close of which, David corrects, as it were, what he had said in the two preceding verses.

2. A sense of being in God's favor, supplies the place of all other good.

Let a person be destitute, not only of the fore-mentioned comforts, but also of health, and liberty, and ease—yet he will, in the light of God's countenance, find all that his soul can desire! Behold Paul and Silas in prison, with their feet in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges! Are they unhappy? No! they sing; they sing aloud at midnight; and what is it that thus enables them to rise above all the feelings of humanity? It is their sense of the Divine presence, and of his blessing upon their souls.

In like manner may the poorest and most destitute of all the human race exult, if only the love of God is shed abroad in his heart; he may adopt the language of Paul, and speak of himself "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things! [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)."

3. A sense of being in God's favor, paves the way to all other good.

Earthly blessings may come alone; but the favor of God brings along with it every other blessing that God can bestow! Even earthly things, as far as they are needful, "are added to those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" and we need scarcely say what peace, and joy, and love, and holiness in all its branches, are brought into the soul in communion with a reconciled God. We may confidently say with Paul, "All things are yours, if you are Christ's, [1 Corinthians 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-23)."

4. A sense of being in God's favor, will never weary.

There is no earthly gratification which may not be enjoyed to satiety; but who was ever weary of the Divine presence? In whom did a sense of God's pardoning love ever excite disgust? A man "in a fullness of earthly sufficiency may be in straits, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22). [Proverbs 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.13);" and it frequently happens that the rich have less comfort in their abundance, than the poor in their more scanty pittance. But "the blessing of the Lord makes rich, and adds no sorrow with it, [Proverbs 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.22);" the man who possesses it has not his enjoyment lessened by repetition or repletion; but, on the contrary, has his capacities enlarged, in proportion as the communications of God's favor are enlarged towards him.

5. A sense of being in God's favor, will never end.

Whatever we possess here, we must soon bid farewell to it; whether our enjoyment is intellectual or corporeal, it must soon come to an end. But the favor of God will last forever, and will then be enjoyed in all its inconceivable fullness, when death shall have deprived us of every other enjoyment. "In God's presence there is a fullness of joy; and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore! [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11)."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are seeking happiness in the things of time and sense.

We ask the votaries of this world whether they have ever found that permanent satisfaction in earthly things which they once hoped for? Has not the creature proved itself to be "a broken cistern that can hold no water?" Is not Solomon's testimony confirmed by universal experience, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit!" If this then is true, why will you not avail yourselves of that information, and go for all your comforts to the fountain-head? "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which cannot satisfy? Hearken diligently unto me; and eat that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness, [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2)."

O let the blessing which the priests of old were authorized to pronounce, be the one object of your desire:

"May the Lord bless you  
    and protect you.  
  May the Lord smile on you  
    and be gracious to you.  
  May the Lord show you His favor  
    and give you His peace." [Numbers 6:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.24-26).

We will thus venture beforehand to assure you that you shall never seek for it in vain. After other things you may inquire, and labor in vain; but the man that looks to God, as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, and desires above all things his favor, shall never be disappointed of his hope!

2. Those who are seeking their happiness in God.

Professing, as you do, that God is a sufficient portion—the world will expect to find that you are superior to it; and that you live as citizens and expectants of a better country. Thus it was that the saints of old lived, [Hebrews 11:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.9-10); and thus must we live, even as our blessed Lord himself set an example for us. If the world hears you inquiring: Who will show me any good? and then sees you seeking it in the vanities of time and sense—will they not say that religion is an empty name, and that it can no more satisfy the soul than their vanities can do? O give no reason for any such sentiment as this! but let it be seen that in having God for your portion, you have a good, which none can estimate but those who possess it, and which the whole world are unable either to diminish or augment! "Whom have I in Heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" [Psalm 73:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25-26).

#500

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

**[Psalm 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.11-12)**

"Let all who put their trust in You, rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield."

David, in speaking of the persecutions which he endured from Saul, represents them as accompanied with every species of malignity on the part of his oppressors, "There is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulcher; they flatter with their tongue." This character we should have been disposed to limit to the agents of Saul; but Paul teaches us to consider it as descriptive of human nature generally, and to apply it, without exception, to every man in [Romans 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.13).

The fact is, that human nature is the same in all ages and places; and if it was so corrupt while under the immediate government of God himself, much more may it be expected to manifest similar corruption under circumstances less favorable for its control. Doubtless, to be reduced to a level with such abandoned men is very humiliating; but it is consoling to know, that if, on the one hand, we resemble them by nature—then we, on the other hand, are partakers of all David's privileges, as soon as ever we are renewed by divine grace. Under his great and accumulated trials, he was often filled with a holy and unutterable joy in God; and such joy is our portion also, if, like him, we place our confidence in God. This is expressly asserted in our text, in which we behold,

I. The character of "the righteous".

"Let all who put their **trust**in You, rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who **love**your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield."

In delineating this, the generality of people would refer to only those actions which had respect to men. But this would give a very partial and inadequate view of the subject. The truth is that a man's character is to be estimated, not so much by his actions towards men, as by the habit of his mind towards God. I do not mean to say that actions are not necessary to evince the truth and excellence of the internal principle; for the principle that is unproductive of holy fruit is of no value—it is a hypocritical pretense, a mere delusion. But actions, though good in themselves, as prayers and alms-givings, may proceed from a wicked principles, and, instead of being acceptable to God, may be perfectly odious in his sight. Hence the righteous are described by characters that admit of no doubt:

1. They **trust** in God.

The righteous have a view of God providence, as ordering all things both in Heaven and earth. They know assuredly, that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his special permission. They see that both men and devils are but as instruments in God's hands; and that, however unconscious they may be of any over-ruling power, they do, in fact, fulfill the will of Almighty God. Hence, whatever is done, they receive it as from God; and whatever is devised against them, they feel themselves secure in his hands. They know that, without him, "no weapon that is formed against them can prosper;" and that, through his gracious care, "all things shall work together for their eternal good."

David was exposed to the most imminent dangers through the malice of Saul; but "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God," and committed all his concerns to him. Just so, the true saint, whoever he may be, flees to God as a sure refuge, and hides himself under the shadow of his wings; assured that, when so protected, no enemy can assault him, no evil find access to him.

In the grace of God also, they trust as well as in his providence. They are well assured, that there is no hope for them in themselves, either as it respects the obtaining of reconciliation with God, or the fulfilling of his holy will.

On the mercy of God, therefore, and on the merits of their Savior, they rely for pardon and acceptance; and to the Lord Jesus they look for such supplies of grace, as their necessities require. Renouncing all confidence in themselves, they go forward, saying, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength."

2. They **love** God.

They behold his glorious perfections, particularly as displayed in the Son of his love, "who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person;" and with holy admiration they prostrate themselves before him, saying, "How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty!" They also contemplate with wonder and gratitude, the love which he has shown to them in choosing them from before the foundation of the world, to be the monuments of his grace, and in imparting to them such supplies of his Spirit as are made effectual for their salvation! It is well said, that "to those who believe, Christ is precious." Yes, "his very name is as ointment poured forth; and to hear and speak of him is the most delightful employment of their souls.

Now, I say, these are the characteristic virtues of the righteous; and these are the graces which are of supreme excellence in the sight of God. It is evident, that by the exercise of these dispositions God is more honored than in all the external acts that can ever be performed; because he himself is the object on whom they terminate, and whose glory they promote!

In immediate connection with these dispositions is,

II. Their blessedness.

1. Who are so joyful as the godly?

"Let them rejoice," says the Psalmist, yes, "let them ever shout for joy." This is their privilege; this is their duty; the very command of God himself is, "Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say, Rejoice!" "Rejoice evermore; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

It is true that there are seasons for humiliation, as well as for joy; but it is true also, that though, in the experience of the worldling, there is a direct opposition between the two feelings, so that they cannot exist together; they may in the saint be called forth into simultaneous exercise and harmonious operation. Indeed, there is no sublimer joy than that which arises out of penitential sorrow, and is tempered by contrition. The very posture of the glorified saints in Heaven bears testimony to this; for they fall on their faces before the throne, at the very time that they sing aloud "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood!" But you will particularly notice what is said, "They rejoice in Him;" it is not in themselves, but in Him alone, "in whom all their fresh springs are found."

2. Who has such ground for joy as the godly?

They are already under the care and protection of their God, "who defends them" from the assaults of all their enemies, and who has pledged himself to be their Protector even to the end; as David says, "You, Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor will you compass him, as with a shield." There is, in another Psalm, a remarkable expression, which beautifully illustrates this, "You will hide them in the secret of your presence." The believer, when sensible of God's presence with his soul, has an assurance of his protection, as much as if he saw with his bodily eyes the whole heavens filled with chariots of fire, and horses of fire, for his defense. He then realizes in his mind the idea that God is a wall of fire round about him; and that whoever shall think to scale it will not only fail, but perish in the attempt! Truly, to feel one's self thus in the very bosom of our God is a joy which the stranger neither understands or possesses!" It is "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!"

APPLICATION.

Seek to be truly "righteous." Do not forget wherein that character primarily consists. Seek to know God, to trust in him, and to love him:  
to know him as revealed to us in his Gospel;  
to trust in him as a Covenant-God and Savior;  
and to love him with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.

Let a sense of his presence with you be your chief joy, and every action of your life be performed for his glory! So will you be preserved from every enemy, and your blessedness be a foretaste of Heaven!

#501

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION AGAINST THE WICKED

**[Psalm 7:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.11-13)**

"God is a righteous judge; and God is angry with the wicked every day! If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts!"

David begins Psalm 97 with, "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice!"

David begins Psalm 99 with, "The Lord reigns; let the earth tremble!"

Either exhortation is suitable, according to the people who are more especially addressed.

The godly may well rejoice, that He whom they serve, has all things at his command!

Well may the ungodly tremble, that He whom they offend is able to vindicate the honor of his insulted Majesty!

To the oppressors and oppressed—this truth is of equal importance.

The oppressed David, reflecting on it with delight, said, "My defense is of God, who saves the upright in heart, verse 10."

But the oppressor may expect this Almighty Being to espouse the cause of his people, and to execute upon their enemies the vengeance which they deserve.

I. In the words before us we see the conduct of God in his moral government here on earth.

The **righteous** are the objects of Gods tender care.

The Jews were governed by judges for above four hundred years, [Acts 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.20); and the term "judging" was used as importing government and protection. In this sense David uses it in another Psalm, where he says, "O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy; for You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth! [Psalm 67:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 67.4)."

Now, there is not any benefit which the most wise or powerful earthly monarch can bestow on his subjects, which God will not impart to his obedient people. Particularly will he shield them from every oppressor, and keep them safely under the shadow of his wings. His care of Abraham and the Patriarchs, in all their pilgrimages, and in all their perils, well illustrates this; as does more especially his constant and miraculous interposition on the behalf of David, amidst the bitter persecutions of the unrelenting Saul. The deliverances given to God's saints of old are still continued to his Church and people; though, from their being less visible, they are, for the most part, overlooked. But God is still "a wall of fire round about them! [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5);" and "whoever touches one of them, touches the apple of His eye! [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)."

The **wicked**, on the contrary, are the objects of God's merited displeasure.

He is not indifferent about the actions of men, as too many suppose. He marks the conduct of the wicked; and "he is angry with them every day." Of course, we are not to suppose that God really feels those strong emotions which we call anger and wrath; such expressions are applied to him only in a figurative sense, in order to teach us what will be his responses towards us. But we do right to use the language of Scripture; and, in conformity with that, I say, that he views with indignation the impiety of those who cast off his fear, and walk after the imagination of their own hearts.

Whether their actions are more or less decent in the eyes of the world, it makes but little difference in God's eyes, so long as they live to themselves, instead of unto him. He looks for them to repent, and "turn to him;" and for this event he waits with much patience and forbearance, "not willing that any of them should perish, but that they all should come to repentance and live."

If they would turn to him, he would lay aside his anger in an instant, and receive them into his arms of mercy. But, while they continue impenitent, he meditates nothing but to display towards them his merited indignation. With a view to their punishment, "he whets his sword, and bends, with an unerring hand, his bow for their destruction." Could we but see with the eye of faith, we would behold the arrow, now already on the string, pointed at their hearts; and nothing remaining, but that the string be loosed from his hand, to bring them down, and to cast them into everlasting perdition!

For them, too, he is preparing the instrument of death, even of everlasting death; as it is written, "Tophet is ordained of old; for the King it is prepared; he has made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it [Isaiah 30:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.33)." Happy would it be if a thoughtless world would consider this; for, whether they will reflect upon it or not, "Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping! [2 Peter 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.3)."

II. God's equitable judgement will be rendered visible to all in his judicial proceedings at the last day.

Then will God approve and reward **the righteous**.

Here on earth they are traduced, and loaded with all manner of obloquy; but there, "He, that tries the hearts and thoughts, [Psalm 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.9)," will appear in their behalf, and vindicate them from the calumnies with which they have been aspersed. He will bear testimony to those secret principles of faith and love whereby they were enabled to live to his glory; and then shall "their righteousness shine forth as the noon-day."

All that they did for him in this world was misinterpreted, as proceeding from pride, or vanity, or hypocrisy—but he will acknowledge them as "Israelites in whom was no deceit;" and, in the presence of their now prostrate enemies, he will exalt them to thrones and kingdoms for evermore!

But God will then consign **the wicked** to merited shame and punishment.

It is remarkable that the day of judgment is called, by Peter, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men, [2 Peter 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.7)." Yes, here on earth, for the most part, they escaped punishment; but there they shall all, without exception, meet a just reward. Wherever they have fled to hide themselves, "his right hand shall find them out;" and to his attendant angels he will say, "Bring here those who were my enemies, who would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me!"

Hear how God contemplates the judgments that await them, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them! [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35)." "As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood, while my sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, the heads of the enemy leaders!" [Deuteronomy 32:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.40-42)."

It is true that these judgments have a primary reference to this world; but they show how inconceivably awful must be the vengeance which he will execute on the ungodly in the world to come! Who can think of these judgments and not tremble? For "who knows the power of his anger?" and "who can dwell with everlasting burnings?"

Application.

1. See the importance of ascertaining your real character before God.

If you will inquire who the wicked are, to whom this fearful doom will be assigned—you will scarcely find one who thinks that they are wicked; all hope that they are in a better state. But God will not judge us by the standard which we have fixed for ourselves, but by that which he has established for us in his Law and in his Gospel.

To what purpose, then, will you deceive yourselves now, when you will so soon be undeceived, and reap the bitter fruits of your folly? O! turn to the Lord without delay; and never rest until you are soundly converted.

2. See the blessedness of having God for your friend.

If God is your *enemy*—then the whole world cannot protect you from his avenging arm! But if God is your *friend*—then who, or what, can really harm you? As for man, he cannot touch a hair of your head without God's permission; and if he is allowed to assault you for a time—then you shall have an ample recompense in the eternal world. Realize the idea that God is governing the world, and will judge it in the last day; and then you need not fear what all the confederate hosts of earth and Hell can do against you!

#502

THE NAME OF GOD, A GROUND OF TRUST

**[Psalm 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.10)**

"Those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

In reading the Holy Scriptures, we should not be satisfied with inquiring into their sense and meaning, but should mark very particularly the character of God, as set forth in them. In the sacred volume, the portrait of Jehovah, if I may so express myself, is drawn, as it were, at full length; so that, as far as such weak creatures as we, are able to comprehend his Divine Majesty, we may form correct notions respecting him.

Few people ever enjoyed better opportunities for discovering his real character than David, who was favored with such ample manifestations of God's power and grace. On what occasion he wrote this Psalm, we know not. It is clear that he wrote it subsequent to his bringing up of the ark to Mount Zion, and before he had vanquished all the surrounding nations. But from all that he had seen and known of God, he gives this testimony respecting him, "Those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

For the elucidating of these words, I will endeavor to show:

I. What the knowledge of God's **Name** imports.

1. God's name imports, not merely a knowledge of the different names by which he is called, but a knowledge of him in his own **essential perfections**.

He was pleased to reveal himself to Moses in express terms, declarative of all his glorious perfections, "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished! [Exodus 34:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.5-7)." But he had previously placed Moses in a cleft of the rock in Horeb, [Exodus 33:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.19-23); which rock was a very eminent type of Christ; and I doubt not but that this was intended to show that in Christ alone, God could be so viewed by fallen man. It is in Christ alone that all these perfections unite and harmonize; and in Christ alone can God be called "a just God and a Savior! [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21). [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26)."

Now, to apprehend God aright, we must have a view of him as revealed in the person of his Son, who is "the image of the invisible God, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15)," the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)." It is in Christ's face alone that all the glory of God shines forth! [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6).

2. God's name imports a knowledge of him in all his **diversified dispensations**.

A view of God's dispensations is particularly marked in my text, as necessary to a just estimate of his character, "Those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you." In truth, it is from the history of God's dealings with his people, far more than from any abstract descriptions of him in the sacred writings, that we learn to estimate his character aright. When did he ever forsake one who sought him? "When did he ever say to any, Seek my face in vain, [Isaiah 45:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.19)." Never did he reject one mourning penitent, or abandon one who humbly and steadfastly relied upon him. His compassion to the penitent, and his fidelity to the believing soul, have never failed. From the beginning of the world has he been, in these respects, "without variableness or shadow of turning, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)."

This we learn from the Prophet Samuel, "The Lord will not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make you his people, 1 Samuel 12:22." True, he may chastise his people for their offences; but yet he will not utterly forsake them, [Psalm 89:30-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-36). He may even "forsake them for a time; but he will surely return to them in tender mercy," at the appointed season, [Isaiah 54:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-8). His assertions on this head are as strong as it is possible for language to express. He has said to every believing soul, "I will never leave you; I will never, never forsake you! [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5)."

Now, it is a view of God's character in these respects, illustrated and confirmed by his actual dispensations; it is this, I say, which properly constitutes "the knowledge of his name."

Having ascertained what this knowledge is, I proceed to show,

II. How a saving knowledge of God will manifest its existence in the soul.

1. A saving knowledge of God will lead that person **to renounce all false confidences**.

Man, while ignorant of God, is always leaning on an arm of flesh. See God's ancient people—how continually were even they, notwithstanding all their advantages, trusting in the creature, rather than in God. To Egypt or Assyria they looked in their troubles, rather than to their heavenly protector! [Isaiah 31:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.1). [Hosea 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.13); [Hosea 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.11). Indeed, there was nothing on which they would not rely, rather than on God, [Isaiah 22:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.8-11). But, when they were made sensible of their folly, and had discovered the real character of God, they instantly renounced all these false confidences, saying, "Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say 'you are our gods' to what our own hands have made, for in You the fatherless find compassion! [Hosea 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.3)."

This same proneness to creature-confidence is found among ourselves. Who does not, at first, rely on . . .  
 his own wisdom to guide him,  
 his own strength to support him, and  
 his own goodness to procure for him acceptance with God?

But, in true conversion we learn where alone our hope is to be placed, even in "God, who works all our works in us, [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12)," and "in Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)."

This was the effect of conversion in Paul, who accounted all his former attainments to be but "loss for Christ, and desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which was of the Law, but the righteousness which was from God by faith in Christ, [Philippians 3:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-9)." And the same effect invariably follows from a discovery of God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus.

2. A saving knowledge of God will lead that person **to rely solely upon God**.

Yes, indeed, "those who know his name will trust in him."

See in David the confidence which such knowledge inspires, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want, [Psalm 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.1)."

See him when he goes forth against Goliath, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! [1 Samuel 17:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.45-46)."

See him when all around him were reduced to despair, "In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates!" [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4)."

David's deliberate sentiment, on all occasions, was this, "I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore! [Psalm 121:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 121.1-9)."

"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! [Romans 8:31-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31-39)."

I sat that there is nothing more severely reproved, throughout the inspired volume, than unbelief and distrust; nor is there anything more highly commended than faith! [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-8).

What, then, is my advice to all?

To every one among you I say,

1. Study the Holy Scriptures.

From human writings you may learn something of God; but from the Scriptures alone can you acquire such a knowledge of God as it is your privilege and your duty to possess!

In reading the Scripture, mark God's every perfection as displayed in his dealings with the men. If you notice facts alone—then you will read Scripture to little purpose. It is his glory, as beaming forth throughout the whole sacred volume, which you are chiefly to contemplate. If your mind is habituated to contemplate God's glory—then you can never lack a ground of consolation or of confidence in any state to which you may, by any possibility, be reduced.

2. Follow the examples of the Scripture saints.

In comparing the character of those who profess Christianity with that of the saints recorded in holy writ, one would be tempted to think that they were of a different species, and belonging to two different worlds; for really, if we heard of people inhabiting one of the planets, they could not differ more widely in their opinions and habits, than the nominal Christian differs from the Scripture saints!

What, for instance, were Paul's opinions? "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord."

And what were Paul's habits? "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." "Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Compare this with the great mass of professing Christians around us, and say what resemblance there is between them. Truly, if we will serve God aright, we must be followers of the Apostle, even as he was of Christ.

As for the world's judgment, we are not to regard it. We must approve ourselves to God; and both put our trust in him and serve him, as those who know they shall be judged by him in the last day. If we follow the footsteps of the flock, then we shall be numbered among the sheep of Christ, and dwell in his fold forever and ever!

#503

THE DANGER OF FORGETTING GOD

**[Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)**

"The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God!"

The most eminent saints are represented in Scripture as weeping over the ungodly world. Nor would this exercise of compassion be so rare, if we duly considered how great occasion there is for it. The words before us are a plain and unequivocal declaration from God himself respecting the doom which awaits every impenitent sinner. May God impress our minds with a solemn awe as we consider them.

I. Who does God regard as being wicked?

If we consult the opinions of men, we shall find that they differ widely from each other in their ideas of moral guilt, and that they include more or less in their definition of wickedness, according to their own peculiar habits of life; every one being careful so to draw the line that he himself may not be comprehended within it. But God does not consult our wishes, or accommodate his Word to our partial regards; he denominates all them wicked, who "forget" him. Doubtless there are degrees of guilt, but:

1. God regards all those as wicked in his sight, who are **heedless of his Word**.

God's Word ought to be written on our hearts, and to be the invariable rule of our conduct. It should be our constant inquiry, What is my duty? What does God command me in his Word? But if this is no part of our concern, if our inquiry is continually: "What will please myself? What will advance my interests? What will suit the taste of those around me"—then are we not wicked? Do we not in all such instances rebel against God, and become, as it were, a god unto ourselves? Yet who among us has not been guilty in these respects?

2. God regards all those as wicked in his sight, who are **forgetful of his benefits**.

Every day and hour of our lives we have been laden with mercies by a kind and bountiful Benefactor. And should not God's mercies to us, have excited correspondent emotions of gratitude in our hearts? Yes, should they not have filled our mouths with praises and thanksgivings? But what shall we say to that greatest of all mercies—the gift of God's dear Son to die for us? Has not that deserved our devoutest acknowledgments? What then if we have passed days and years without any affectionate remembrance of God? What if we have even abused the bounties of his providence, and poured contempt upon the riches of his grace? What if we have "trodden under foot the Son of God, and done despite to the Spirit of grace?" Are we not then wicked? Do we account such ingratitude a trivial offence, when exercised by a dependent towards ourselves?

3. God regards all those as wicked in his sight, who are **unmindful of his presence**.

God is everywhere present, and every object around us has this inscription upon it, "You see me O God!" Now it is our duty and privilege to walk with God as his friends, and to set him before us all the day long. But, suppose we have been unmindful of his presence, and have indulged without remorse those thoughts, which we could not have endured to carry into practice in the presence of a fellow-creature; suppose we have been careless and unconcerned even when we were assembled in God's house of prayer; suppose that, instead of having him in all our thoughts, we have lived "without him in the world"—then are we not wicked? Is it necessary to have added murder or adultery to such crimes as these in order to constitute us wicked? Does God judge thus, when he declares that those who are thus without God, are at the same time "without hope? [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)."

While we rectify our notions respecting the people that are wicked, let us inquire,

II. What will be the final doom of the wicked?

The word "Hell" sometimes imports no more than the grave; but here it must mean something far more awful; because the righteous go into the grave as well as the most vile.

Hell is a place of inconceivable misery.

Men in general do not wish to hear this place so much as mentioned, much less described, as the portion of the wicked. But it is better far to hear of it, than to dwell in it! And it is by hearing of it that we must be persuaded to avoid it! [2 Corinthians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.11). Our Lord represents it as a place originally formed for the reception of the fallen angels; and very frequently labors to deter men from sin by the consideration of its terrors, [Luke 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.5). [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48). And who that reflects upon that "lake of fire and brimstone," where the wicked "dwell with everlasting burnings," and "weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth," without so much as the smallest hope of deliverance from it, and where "the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever;" who that considers what it must be to have the devils for our companions, and to have the vials of God's wrath poured out upon us, without intermission and without end—who that considers these things, must not tremble at the thought of taking up his eternal abode in that place?

Yet Hell must be the portion of all who forget God.

Now scoffers make light of eternal torments, and sneer at the denunciations of God's wrath. But before long they will call out "to the mountains and the rocks: Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" However reluctant they are to obey the divine mandate, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!" they must be "turned into Hell" with irresistible force, and with fiery indignation!

Their numbers will not at all secure them against the threatened vengeance; though there are whole "nations," they will not be able to withstand the omnipotent arm of God; nor will they excite commiseration in his heart; neither will their misery be the less because of the multitudes who partake of it. For instead of alleviating one another's sorrows with tender sympathy, they will accuse one another with the bitterest invectives.

The power and veracity of God are pledged to execute this judgment; and sooner shall Heaven and earth be annihilated, than one jot or tittle of his Word shall fail!

INFERENCES.

1. How awful is the **insensibility** in which the wicked are living!

Men seem as careless and indifferent about their eternal interests as if they had nothing to fear; or as if God had promised that the wicked would be received into Heaven! But can they set aside the declaration that is now before us? Or do they suppose it is intended merely to alarm us; and that it shall never be executed upon us? "Is God then a man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent?" O that they would awake from their delusive dream, and flee from the wrath to come!

2. How just will be the **condemnation** of the wicked in the last day!

Many think it a harsh thing that so heavy a judgment should be denounced merely for forgetting God. But is this so small an offence as they imagine? Is it not rather exceedingly heinous? Does it not imply the basest ingratitude, the most daring rebellion, yes, a great degree even of atheism itself? And shall not God visit the wicked for these things, and be avenged on such transgressors as these? Shall they be at liberty to abuse God's mercies—and God not be at liberty to suspend the communication of his blessings? Shall they despise and trample on God's laws—and God not be at liberty to assert their authority? Shall they say to God, "Depart from us, we do not desire the knowledge of your ways!" And shall God be accused of injustice if he says to them, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41)." But if they will dare to open their mouths against him now, the time is shortly coming, when they will stand self-convicted, and sell-condemned.

3. How marvelous are **the patience and the mercy of God**!

God has seen the whole race of man departing from him, and blotting out, as much as they could, the remembrance of him from the earth. His authority, his love, his mercy—are, as it were, by common consent banished from the conversation and from the very thoughts of men. Yet, instead of burning with indignation against us, and "turning us all quickly into Hell," he bears with us, he invites us to mercy, he says, "Deliver them from going down into the pit; for I have found a ransom! [Job 33:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.24)."

O that we might be duly sensible of his mercy! O that we might flee for refuge to the hope set before us! If once we are cast into Hell, we shall never obtain "one drop of water to cool our tongues!" But "this is the accepted time;" the Lord grant that we may find it also, "the day of salvation!"

#504

MEN'S PROUD CONTEMPT OF GOD

**[Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-5)**

"In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty, and your judgments are on high, out of his sight; he sneers at all his enemies."

Pride, when manifested in a flagrant manner, universally excites disgust! So hateful it is, when divested of the subtle garb in which it is generally clothed. But though all hate pride when it appears in others—few are sensible how much it reigns within their own bosoms. In our converse with man, this evil disposition is ready to show itself on every occasion; but in our conduct towards God, it is the fruitful parent of habitual neglect, and atheistical contempt. This is affirmed in the passage before us, in which we may notice,

I. The state of the wicked.

It is not easy to conceive a more humiliating description of their character than that given us by the Psalmist:

"In his pride the wicked does not seek him."

God invites them to seek his face, and promises that he will be found by them; but they cannot be prevailed upon either by promises or threats. They will seek with eagerness an earthly object that may make them happy; but they account God unworthy of any notice or regard! [Job 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 35.10).

"In all his thoughts there is no room for God."

It is astonishing to what a degree men often banish God from their minds! They will pass days, months, and even years, without one reverential thought of him—unless when they are alarmed by some awful providence, or awakened by some faithful reproof; and then, unless the grace of God prevents them, they will cast him out of their minds again as soon as possible, and drown their thoughts in business or sin, [Job 21:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14-15).

They account God's ways, as far as they know them, to be grievous.

When urged to devote themselves to God in sincerity and truth, they conceive that such a state is unattainable, or, at least, incompatible with the common duties and offices of life. They call the indulgence of their lusts, liberty; and the exercise of vital godliness, an intolerable bondage! Every part of the divine life is irksome to them, and that too, not occasionally, but always, without any change or intermission.

The judgments of God are far above them, out of their sight!

By the "judgments" of God we understand his Word and works. Now these are not only out of their sight in some particulars (for in some respects they are incomprehensible even to the most enlightened saints) but they are altogether foolishness unto the wicked, 1 Corinthians 2:14. When the mysteries of redemption are opened, they are esteemed by the wicked as "cunningly-devised fables;" and when the marvelous interpositions of Providence are insisted on, they are ready to exclaim, with Ezekiel's hearers, "Does he not speak parables? [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.49)."

"As for all their enemies, they sneer at them."

If God himself threatens them as an enemy, they disregard his threats. The denunciations of his wrath are deemed by them unworthy of any serious attention. They even puff at them with contempt and disdain. They quiet all their fears, saying, like them of old, "Tush, God shall not see us; neither will the Almighty regard it, [Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7)." "I am safe, even though I am following the desires of my own stubborn heart! [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19)."

In order to account for this state of things, let us trace it to,

II. The real source of their wickedness.

We might trace this practical atheism to men's ignorance and unbelief; but the Psalmist suggests to us the true ground and occasion of it—it all arises from the pride of their hearts!

Men are **too good**, in their own estimation, to need God's mercy.

They will confess that they are not altogether so good as they might be; but they do not think they deserve God's wrath and indignation. Why then should they trouble themselves to ask for mercy at his hands, when they are in no danger of suffering his judgments?

They are also **too strong**, in their own estimation, to need his aid.

They imagine that they can repent when they please, and that, whenever they resolve, they can easily carry their resolutions into effect. If they thought that "without God they could do nothing," and that "he must give them both to will and to do," and that "God must grant them repentance"—then there would be reason for imploring his assistance; but, when they acknowledge no such dependence upon God, why should they seek his aid?

Moreover, they are **too wise**, in their own estimation, to need the teachings of his Spirit.

They see, perhaps, their need of a revelation to discover to them the mind and will of God; but, when that is once given, they are not conscious that they need a spiritual illumination to truly understand the truths contained in it. They suppose their reason to be as sufficient for the investigation of spiritual, as of carnal things; and under that persuasion, they consider all application to God for the teachings of his Spirit, as enthusiastic and absurd.

Finally, they are **too happy**, in their own estimation, to need the divine presence.

They are occupied with carnal pleasure, and wish for nothing beyond it. If only they can have the undisturbed indulgence of their appetites—it is, to them, all the Paradise they desire. As for the light of God's countenance, and the manifestations of his love—they know not what is meant by such things; they suppose that they exist only in the pretensions of hypocrites, and the conceits of fanatics.

In short, like those of Laodicea, they possess such an imaginary sufficiency within themselves, that they have no need of God at all! "They say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked!" [Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17). And hence it is that they have no desire to have God in all their thoughts.

INFERENCES.

1. How astonishing is the depravity of human nature!

If all are not equally addicted to gross sins—then all are equally "without God in the world! [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)." All have a "carnal mind that is enmity against God! [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7)." Alas! What a picture of human nature! Let "every mouth then be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God! [Romans 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-12); [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19)."

2. How great is the change that takes place in conversion!

The state of a converted soul forms a perfect contrast with that of the wicked. "Old things pass away, and all things become new." Let all then ask themselves, Am I now devoting myself to God, as once I did to the world; and despising the world, as once I despised God? This is indeed "a new creation! [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)."

3. How necessary is conversion in order to an enjoyment of Heaven!

There must be within ourselves a fitness for Heaven before we can enjoy it, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12). Do not let those then who banish God from their thoughts, and cast off his yoke, suppose that they could be happy in Heaven, even if they were admitted there. If they would find happiness in God forever, they must somewhat attain in this world a conformity to his image, and a delight in his commandments.

#505

MEN'S CONTEMPT OF GOD

**[Psalm 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.11)**, **[13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Psalm 10.13)**

"He says to himself, 'God has forgotten; He covers his face and never sees!'"

"Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself: He won't call me to account?"

The thoughts of God respecting the nature and malignity of sin, are widely different from those which are entertained in the hearts of natural men. Men consider themselves as innocent if their outward conduct is not grossly reprehensible, and what they cannot justify in their actions they mitigate under lenient expressions. But God notices the very frame and dispositions of the heart! He clearly and infallibly interprets the language of men's thoughts. He declares that the wickedness of their actions proceeds from the atheism in their hearts, [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1).

Thus, in the Psalm before us, he reveals the secret motives by which the wicked are actuated, verses 2, 4, 6, 11, and puts the right construction on their thoughts verse 13.

Let us consider,

I. The **ground** of the natural man's expostulations.

Were all the lineaments of man's contempt of God to be drawn, we would scarcely ever finish the dreadful portrait!

We make light of:  
 the Father's authority,  
 the Son's sin-atoning sacrifice,  
 the Spirit's influence in regeneration.

Every office they sustain, every attribute they possess, every relation they bear to us—we disregard and dishonor. We . . .  
overlook God's providence,  
are unmindful of his Word,  
neglect his ordinances,  
and despise his people.

But, waving all other points, we fix our attention on that mentioned in the text, namely: Our virtual denial of God's punitive justice.

Men evidence by their lives, that they think God will not require an account of their sin.

1. Their impenitence for their past sins shows it.

They do not humble themselves for sin, or seek after a Savior; and what is the language of this, but, "God does not regard, nor will require an account of their sin?"

2. Their unconcern about forsaking sin in the future, shows it.

They indulge all their evil habits, rush carelessly into temptations, listen to no admonitions, seek not God's aid, and even stifle their convictions! Does not this say, "Sin may be indulged with impunity, God will not require an account of their sin!"

Know then that this thought, or language of their hearts, is a contempt of God himself!

It is a contempt of God's holiness.

Instead of regarding him as an infinitely Holy Being, [Isaiah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.3). [Hebrews 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.13)—it supposes him to be such a one as ourselves! [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.21).

It is a contempt of God's justice.

The Scripture speaks of God as just, [Deuteronomy 32:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.4)—but this intimates that he is indifferent about the execution of his laws, [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12).

It is a contempt of God's wisdom.

The contriving of the plan of redemption was the greatest effort of divine wisdom; but this declares that the devising of it was superfluous, and that an attention to it is unnecessary.

It is a contempt of God's mercy.

God in infinite mercy offers us salvation through his Son, [Isaiah 55:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-2)—but this is a determinate refusal of his gracious offers.

Such is the construction which God himself puts upon it, [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.30). [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4).

II. The expostulation itself.

The question in our text is manifestly an indignant expostulation. I ask then,

1. What assurance has any man that God will not require an account of their sin?

Supposing it possible or even probable, who can be certain of it? What folly then must it be to continue in sin through hopes of impunity; when the mistake, if it is one, will be irrevocable, and the consequence of it irremediable! We are bound, in common prudence, to choose the safer side!

2. Has not God clearly said that he will require an account of their sin?

The testimonies to this effect are most indubitable, [1 Corinthians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9). [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3). Can we suppose that God will falsify his Word? [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19). [2 Timothy 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.13).

3. Has not God in many instances, already required an account of their sin?

Have not individuals, companies, cities, nations, the whole world, yes, man in Paradise, and angels in Heaven, been made monuments of divine vengeance? Jude verse 6 and 7. Why may he not manifest his indignation against us also?

4. Will not the account be dreadful, if God will require an account of their sin?

No heart can conceive the terrors of the final judgment. Who, in his right mind, would risk the loss of Heaven, and the suffering of Hell?

5. Can any power or policy of men prevent God's requiring an account of their sin?

Let us first avert death from our bodies, or provide an answer to Job's question, [Job 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.4), "Who has hardened himself against God and prospered?" Not earth and Hell combined can prevent the punishment of one sinner! [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21).

APPLICATION.

Let us see how deeply we have been involved in this guilt. If our outward actions have been correct, still have we, to an incalculable amount, committed sin by our very thoughts!

O let us flee for refuge to the hope set before us! Happy am I to declare that there is a way wherein a person may not only think this in his heart, but express it with his lips. If we believe in Christ, God will never require sin at our hands, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39); and to express it, so far from pouring contempt on God, will greatly honor him. God is not more honored by anything than the humble confidence of a believer, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20). Let us all therefore lay our sins on the head of the true scape-goat, so shall they never be required of us in the day of judgment, [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19).

#506

THE WORKINGS OF UNBELIEF AND OF FAITH

**[Psalm 11:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-7)**

"In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence, his soul hates. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face."

(The three first verses of the Psalm should be read as one continued speech, and then the force and spirit of the passage is made clear.)

The Psalms are a rich repository of experimental knowledge! David, at the different periods of his life, was placed in almost every different situation in which a believer, whether rich or poor, can be placed; and in these heavenly compositions, he delineates all the workings of his heart. He introduces, too, the opinions and conduct of the various people who were accessary either to his troubles or his joys; and thus sets before our eyes a compendium of all that is passing in the hearts of men throughout the world.

When he penned this Psalm, he was under persecution from Saul, who sought his life, and hunted him "as a partridge upon the mountains." His timid friends were alarmed for his safety, and recommended him to flee to some mountain where he had a hiding-place; and thus to conceal himself from the rage of Saul. But David, being strong in faith, spurned the idea of resorting to any such cowardly expedients, and determined confidently to repose his trust in God.

Thus in this Psalm we see, in a contrasted view,

I. The counsels of **unbelief**.

Unbelief always views the dark side of a question; and not only keeps out of view those considerations that should animate and encourage the soul, but suggests others which are most injurious to its welfare:

1. Unbelief magnifies the difficulties we have to encounter.

Doubtless the dangers which encompassed David were great and imminent; the arrows with which his enemies sought to kill him, were already on the string, pointed at him, as it were, and needing only to be drawn, in order to pierce him to the heart! The foundations also of law and justice were so entirely subverted under the government of Saul, that there was nothing to prevent the wicked from executing their murderous plots.

But still there is no sufficient ground for that desponding question, "What can the righteous do?" Methinks the question under any circumstances is not only unbelieving, but atheistic; for if there is a God, and that God is a hearer of prayer, the question would rather be, 'What can the righteous not do?'

Let us look at an instance or two, as a specimen of what a godly man may do, even when, according to human appearance, the circumstances may be most desperate.

The whole army of Israel is appalled at the sight of one gigantic warrior; yet a young stripling, with his sling and stone, destroys the giant, and puts to flight the whole army of the Philistines.

Again, at a period when idolatry so prevailed in Israel, that Elijah thought himself the only worshiper of Jehovah in the whole land, one righteous man stems the torrent, destroys the priests of Baal, and demolishes all his temples and altars throughout the country.

But another instance of singular importance is that of Oded in 2 Chronicles 28:9-15; who, by his own unaided expostulation, liberated two hundred thousand captives, and constrained their victorious enemies not only to restore them to their homes without injury, but to treat them with a tenderness truly parental.

Shall anyone, after such instances as these, and many others that might be mentioned, ask, "What can the righteous do?" We should remember, that, as "with God all things are possible," so "all things are possible to him who believes" Yes, "if we have faith only as a grain of mustard-seed, we may root up trees or mountains, and cast them into the depths of the sea."

2. Unbelief prompts to the use of unfitting expedients.

However it might be proper for David to use prudential cautions, and not to put himself directly into the hands of Saul, it did not befit him to "flee as a bird to his mountain," just as if he had no refuge in his God. His duty was to repose a confidence in God, and to expect assuredly the accomplishment of all God's promises towards him, in spite of all the efforts of his most malignant enemies. But such is constantly the voice of unbelief; it bids us not wait God's time, but contrive some way for ourselves, lest perhaps God should have forgotten his engagements, or not be able to fulfill them.

Thus it operated in Rebecca. She knew that God had designed the blessings of the birthright for Jacob, her younger son; but when she saw that Isaac's intention was in the space of an hour or two to give them to Esau—she conceived that the Divine purpose would be frustrated, if she did not instantly interpose for its accomplishment. To what a system of falsehood and treachery she had recourse, is too well known to need any recital; but it is a striking instance of the tendency of unbelief.

Just so, who does not feel this tendency in his own heart? Who has not at some unhappy moment sought, by dissimulation or concealment, to avoid the cross, which a more faithful confession of the Savior would have brought upon him? But to use any indirect means either to avoid an evil or to obtain a good, is a certain proof of an unbelieving heart; for, "He who believes will not make haste."

In the noble reply of David to his friends, we behold,

II. The dictates of **faith**.

It is the peculiar province of faith to "see Him who is invisible;" and in all situations to have respect to God:

1. As an Almighty Sovereign.

Mark the answer which David, with holy indignation, gives to his timid advisers, "How then can you say to me: Flee like a bird to your mountain? When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

This is my answer to all such vain fears, "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne!" What plots can men or devils form, which God does not see? Or what can they attempt to execute, which God cannot defeat? He who sits m the heavens "laughs them to scorn." "He disappoints the devices of the crafty, so that they cannot perform their enterprise;" yes, "he takes the wise in their own craftiness."

It is not possible to find a more beautiful elucidation of this subject than that which is recorded in the history of Elisha. When the king of Syria was warring against Israel, behold, all his plans were made known to the king of Israel; and were thereby defeated. But how were these secrets made known? Was it by treason? No! God revealed to Elisha the things which the king of Syria spoke in his bed-chamber. The king of Syria determined therefore that he would kill Elisha, and sent an army to encompass the city wherein Elisha was. Elisha's servant, just like David's friends, cried, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" But, when God opened his eyes, he saw the whole surrounding atmosphere filled with horses of fire and chariots of fire; and soon afterwards he saw the whole Syrian army smitten with blindness, and led by the prophet into the very heart of their enemy's country! [2 Kings 6:8-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.8-20).

Just so, all the saints are watched over by an Almighty Power; and under his protection they are safe.

2. As a righteous Judge.

It may be that God sees fit to let the enemies of his people prevail over them. But their success is only for a moment; the time is near at hand when the apparent inequality of these dispensations will be rectified; when God, as "a righteous Judge, will recompense tribulation to those who trouble us; and to us who are troubled, rest." He narrowly inspects "His eyelids test" as people narrowly inspecting some very minute object, almost close their eyelids, to exclude every other object, not the actions only, but the dispositions also, of men, in order to render unto them according to their works!

"The wicked his soul hates!" And in due time "he will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest!" even as he did upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Yes, "this shall be the portion of their cup;" and they "shall drink it to the very dregs!"

On the other hand, "He loves the righteous, and beholds them with delight;" and reserves for them a weight of glory proportioned to all that they have done and suffered for him.

The believer is persuaded of all this—whom then shall he fear? He knows that no weapon formed against him can prosper, unless Infinite Wisdom has ordained that it shall. He knows that no evil can be allowed to approach him which shall not be recompensed a hundred-fold even in this life; and much more in that world where God himself will be the unalienable portion of all his people!

How these views compose the mind may be seen throughout all the Sacred Records. See [Psalm 7:10-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.10-17); [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1). And these views will always be realized in proportion to our faith.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who meet with opposition in their Christian course.

You are tempted perhaps by Satan, and by timid friends, to "put your light under a bushel," instead of causing it to "shine before men for the glory of your God." But you should say as Nehemiah, "Shall such a man as I flee?" No! My Savior shunned not the cross for me; and, God helping me, I will gladly take up my cross and follow him!

Beware how you listen to flesh and blood, or attempt to reconcile the services of God and mammon. To "follow the Lord fully" is the only true way to present peace and everlasting happiness.

2. Those who are ready to faint by reason of spiritual conflicts.

It is surely an arduous task to "wrestle with all the principalities and powers of Hell;" but, "if God is for you, then who can be against you?" Do not, because of some occasional darkness, say, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." But know that your God is infinite both in wisdom and power; and that he is engaged to keep all who trust in him! [Isaiah 40:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-29).

Reject then with indignation the unbelieving suggestions of your great adversary; and, if for a moment he prevails against you, chide yourselves for your cowardice, as David did, "Why are you cast down, O my soul; and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God! [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)."

Consider the force of our Lord's reproof to Martha, "Did I not say unto you, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God? [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40)." The same then he says to us. Let us therefore "never stagger at his promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." Let David's confidence be ours also, "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield! [Psalm 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.11-12)."

#507

PRACTICAL ATHEISM EXPOSED

**[Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)**

"Who is Lord over us?"

That "the world lies in wickedness," is a truth generally acknowledged. But it is by the more heinous acts alone that men in general estimate the wickedness around them; whereas in order to form a correct judgment, they should mark the alienation of heart from God which is observable, not in gross sinners only, but in the more moral and decent part of mankind. A spirit of independence pervades all ranks and orders of men; and though all do not live in the same measure of open rebellion against God, all concoct a standard of their own, to which to conform their lives; and, in reference to all beyond it, they say, as those in my text, "Who is Lord over us?" To illustrate this, I will show,

I. The atheism of the heart.

Whether there are any who really believe there is no Supreme Being, I think, may well be doubted; since there is not an ignorant savage who does not imagine that there is some Being superior to himself, and some Being that takes cognizance of his deportment. But a secret atheism abounds in every place; insomuch, that all who are yet in a state of nature will ask, "Who is Lord over us?"

1. Who is Lord over us, **to inspect our ways**?

That this is the sentiment of the unregenerate heart is evident, from the declaration which is made in another Psalm, which the Apostle quotes as applicable to every man, "He has said in his heart, God has forgotten; he hides his face; he will never see it." And again, "He has said in his heart: You will not require it! [Psalm 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.11); [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13)."

If people were sensible of *the divine presence*, and that God marks every motion of their hearts—could they give such a license as they do to sin, or commit it with so little fear? No! If only their sins are hidden from the eyes of men, they are satisfied; and that which was erroneously imputed by Eliphaz to Job, is really fulfilled in them, "Yet you say: 'What does God know? Does he judge through such darkness? Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us as he goes about in the vaulted heavens.' [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14)."

2. Who is Lord over us, **to order our paths**?

This is strongly exemplified in our text. "They say: With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own; Who is Lord over us?" It is painful to observe with what daring impiety men will "cast God's Words behind them, [Nehemiah 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.26)." Declare to them the commands of men, and they will have an ear to hear; but speak to them of the commands of God, and they reject it with scorn! They reply, in heart at least, if not in word also, "As for the word that you have spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto you; but we will certainly do whatever goes forth out of our own mouth! [Jeremiah 44:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16-17)." Pharaoh, it is true, was hardened beyond the generality of men; but his answer to Moses is still that of the generality among ourselves, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord; neither will I obey his voice! [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2)."

3. Who is Lord over us, **to supply our needs**?

Whatever be the needs of an ungodly man, he will look to himself, or to the world, to supply them. He has no idea that God is observant of them, or will humble himself so low as to regard them. Now, this is a part of that same disposition which we have before noticed; and is no other than a denial of God. Job says, "If I have made gold my hope, or said to the fine gold, You are my confidence; this would be an iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for then I would have denied the God who is above, [Job 31:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.24); [Job 31:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.28)."

4. Who is Lord over us, **to call us to an account for our sins**?

Men imagine that what is past is all forgotten, and that they shall never hear of it any more. This is what the Psalmist so justly reproves, "They say: "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed." Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge? The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile! [Psalm 94:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7-11)."

Elihu, also, conceiving it to be indulged by Job, utters a similar rebuke, "Although you say you shall not see him—yet judgment is before him! [Job 35:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 35.14)."

Now, though in none of these particulars, perhaps, will men deny in words the interposition of Heaven; yet, in their hearts, they so far disbelieve it, that they act without any reference to it, and live, practically at least, as "atheists in the world! [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12).

Let me, however, proceed to show you,

II. The folly of atheism.

Foolish in the extreme is this atheistic disregard of God. For,

1. Your atheism will not alter the state of things.

We may deny the agency, or even the existence, of God; but He will exist, and act too, in despite of us. We cannot reverse the order of created things; how, then, can we affect the Creator himself? He will sit on his throne, notwithstanding us; and will mark our conduct, and record it in the book of his remembrance; and call us into judgment for it, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not.

Now, if by denying these things we could change the course of them, then there would be some reason for our conduct; but when we can alter nothing, but only deceive our own souls, it is little short of madness to continue in unbelief.

In truth, we would call it madness if any man were to pursue such conduct in reference to earthly things. Suppose a man were to deny the tendency of bodies to gravitate towards the center of the earth, and the power of fire to burn; and, in support of his opinions, were to leap down a precipice, or thrust his hand into the fire—would we be at any loss how to designate that conduct? Yet it would not be a whit more foolish than to go on in sin, on the presumption that God does not mark, or will not judge, the thoughts and actions of men! In this case, precisely as in the other, we only rush on to our perdition!

2. Your atheism will not alter the outcome of things.

We may declaim on the injustice of God, in consigning men to everlasting misery for the sins of time; or we may deny that there is any such place as Hell. But it shall surely be the abode of the wicked, whether we will believe it or not.

To judgment we shall be called;  
by our works we shall be judged;  
God's sentence shall be according to justice;  
nor shall we be able to withstand it.

All that we do by our present unbelief is only to insure that very doom which now we presume to deny. Then shall we find, that there is a Lord over us; and that we can neither elude nor withstand his power!

If now we admit the truth of these things, we may avert the misery with which we are threatened, and secure the happiness which is offered to us; but if we persevere in an atheistic denial of them, nothing remains for us, but to learn from experience what we will not learn from reason or the Word of God.

Let me CONCLUDE with answering the question which is thus presumptuously proposed.

Do you ask, "Who is Lord over us?"

I answer, The Lord Jesus Christ is; and "he has sworn, that unto him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess! [Isaiah 45:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23)." O that you would now submit yourselves unto him!

What would he not do for you?

What judgments would he not avert?

What blessings would he not communicate?

Remember that "He is God, and there is no other! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)." Whatever you may imagine, you can never "prevail" against him. As for "your lips being your own;" nothing that you have is your own. You are the work of God's hands; and he has a right to every power that you possess. Take him, then, as your Lord; and yield yourselves to him as his subjects; and then you may very safely ask, "Whom have I to fear?" Beloved, reject this Lord, and none can save you! Give yourselves up to him, and "none can harm you! [1 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13)."

#508

THE COMMONNESS AND FOLLY OF ATHEISM

**[Psalm 14:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1-3)**

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God!'

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one!"

Men, who judge only by the outward appearance, are apt to entertain a good opinion of themselves. But God, who looks at the heart, describes the whole race of mankind as immersed in an unfathomable abyss of wickedness. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9)."

In confirmation of this melancholy truth we need look no further than to the declaration in the text. It may be thought indeed that the text is spoken only in reference to a few professed infidels; but the words immediately following show that it relates to many, yes to all mankind, "All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one!"

Above all, Paul, speaking expressly upon the subject of human depravity, appeals to this very passage as decisively establishing that doctrine. "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one!" [Romans 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-12)."

In considering the words before us we shall show,

I. The atheistic thoughts and desires of the heart.

God interprets the thoughts and desires of the heart as though they were expressed in words; and he attests the heart's real language to be like that in the text.

1. The heart's real language may be understood **as an assertion**.

The name here used for God is not Jehovah, which relates to his essence, but Elohim, which characterizes him as the moral governor of the world. The words therefore must be understood, not as declaring that there is no God, but that there is no God who interferes in human affairs.

It is true there are not many, who will deliberately affirm this in plain terms; but, alas! how many are there, whose actions manifest this to be the inward thought of their hearts! If we look around us, we shall see the great mass of mankind living as if there were no superior Being to whom they owed obedience, or to whom they were accountable for their sinful conduct. They inquire constantly whether such or such a line of conduct will tend to their comfort, their honor, or their interest; but how rarely do they examine whether it will please God! How will men gratify in secret, or at least harbor in their bosoms, those lusts which they could not endure to have exposed to the eye of a fellow-creature, while yet they feel no concern at all about the presence of their God! The language of their hearts is, "The LORD does not see us! [Ezekiel 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 8.12)." "Yet you say: What does God know? Does he judge through such darkness? Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us as he goes about in the vaulted heavens, [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14)," ignorant and indifferent about the affairs of men!

And as we thus refuse to acknowledge God ourselves, so we desire that any others should not acknowledge him. Is anyone of our companions awed by the fear of God? How ready are we to laugh at his scruples, and to propose to him the customs and maxims of the world as more worthy of his regard than the mind and will of God; and to encourage him in the hope that such compliances shall never be noticed in the day of judgment! And what is this but to use the very language which God imputes to us, "I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad!' [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)."

2. The heart's real language may be understood **as a wish**.

The words "There is" are not in the original, and may therefore be omitted; the text will then stand thus: The fool has said in his heart, No God! That is, I wish there were no God. And how common a wish is this!

When men are fully convinced in their minds that God notices every transaction of their lives, and records it in the book of his remembrance, they are still unwilling to give up their lusts, and determined to continue in sin at all events. But are they easy in such a state? No! they shrink back at the prospect of death and judgment, and wish that they could elude the summons that will be given them in the last day. Gladly would they sleep an eternal sleep, and barter their immortality for an exemption from appearing at the tribunal of God.

What satisfaction would they feel if they could be certified on unquestionable grounds, that God did not notice their actions, or that, notwithstanding he is the Governor and Judge of all—he has decreed to bestow on them the blessing of annihilation! Instantly they would exclaim, Now I may dismiss my fears; now I may take my fill of pleasure, and "drink iniquity like water"—without any dread of future consequences!

We may appeal to the consciences of all, whether such have not been frequently the thoughts of their hearts, or, at least, whether their dread of death and judgment do not justly admit of these thoughts and desires?

Such being the thoughts and desires of the heart, we proceed to show,

II. The folly of entertaining atheistic thoughts.

This will appear in a striking point of view, if we take into consideration the three following truths.

1. The thing wished for is absolutely impossible.

God can no more cease to inspect the ways of men with a view to a final retribution, than He can cease to exist. As his superintending care is necessary for the preservation of the universe, so the continual exercise of his moral government is necessary for the vindication of his own honor. How absurd then is it to indulge a wish, when it is not possible for that wish ever to be gratified, and when the indulging of it makes us act as though it would be gratified! How much better would it be it to say at once:

There is a God, and I must fear him!

There is a judgment, and I must prepare for it!

2. If the wish could be obtained, it would be an unspeakable injury to all, even in this world.

Men are led, even by the faintest hopes of impunity, to live in sin! How much more would they yield themselves up to sin's dominion, if they could once be sure that God would never call them into judgment for it!

This, as it respects individuals, would greatly embitter this present life. The gratification of their lusts would indeed afford them a transient pleasure; but who that considers how soon such enjoyments cloy; who that knows how many evils they bring in their train; who that has seen the effects of unbridled passions, of pride, envy, wrath, malice, of lewdness, covetousness, or any other inordinate affection; who that has the least knowledge of these things can doubt, but that sin and misery are indissolubly connected, and that, in proportion as we give the rein to our lusts, we undermine our own happiness?

And what would be the consequence to the community at large? Men, even now, "bite and devour one another" like wild beasts, the very instant that God withdraws his restraint from them! Who was it that overruled the purposes of a lewd Abimelech, of a covetous Laban, and of a revengeful Esau? It was God alone; and it is the same God that now keeps the world in any measure of peace and quiet. If once the world were bereft of God's providence, it would instantly resemble that world, where the dispositions of men are allowed to rage without control, and all incessantly to torment themselves, and all around them. Is it not then the extreme folly to entertain a wish that would involve in it such tremendous consequences?

3. It would be productive of still greater evil as it respects the world to come.

Doubtless, if there were no moral governor of the universe—then there would be no fear of future punishment in Hell. The thought of this would be a great delight to ungodly men. But they, on the other hand, entertain no hope of Heaven; their brightest prospect would be annihilation. Melancholy prospect indeed!

How much better, even for the most ungodly, to have:  
 a God to flee unto;  
 a God to pardon their iniquities;  
 a God to sanctify and renew their souls;  
 a God to bless them with immortality and glory!

They need not to wish for the cessation of his agency, or the extinction of their own existence, seeing that he is rich in mercy unto all who call upon him, and ready to receive returning prodigals.

And is it not for the interest of all, that there should be such a God? Is not the prospect of obtaining his favor, and participating in his glory better than annihilation, more especially when the terms of our acceptance with him are so easy? He requires nothing but that we should humble ourselves before him, and plead the merits of his dear Son, and renounce the ways that have been displeasing to him. The very instant we return to him in this manner, he will "cast all our sins into the depths of the sea," and embrace us with the arms of his mercy! What madness then to wish that there were no such Being!

Inferences:

1. How great is the patience of God!

God sees, not one only or even many, but all the world:   
 living without God, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12),  
 banishing him from their thoughts, [Psalm 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4),  
 and wishing him banished from his universe!

Yet he not only bears with them, but follows them with invitations and promises, and waits to be gracious unto them; Let us stand amazed at his goodness; and let that goodness lead us to repentance.

2. How glorious is the change that takes place in conversion!

Grace no sooner enters into the heart than it slays this vehement enmity against God, and reconciles the sinner to Him. Henceforth it becomes his one desire to walk with God, to enjoy his presence, to fulfill his will, and to live in the near prospect of participating in his glory! How enviable is such a state! Compare the wisdom of such a state with the folly which we have been exposing. Let us instantly begin to live, as we shall wish we had lived, when we come to die!

#509

BELIEVERS VINDICATED

**[Psalm 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.6)**

"You evildoers frustrate the counsel of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge."

One would imagine that true religion, as brought into lively and habitual exercise, should commend itself to all; it is so reasonable a service, that one would suppose none could find fault with it. Yet, never has it been maintained by anyone since the first introduction of sin into the world, without provoking hostility from those who were not under its dominion.

As for David, he suffered for it through all the reign of Saul, and through a great part also of his own reign; for, though a king, he was an object of derision to all the scoffers in the land. Of this he complains in the Psalm before us; for though it is probable that Absalom was the great instigator of the present evils, the people, too, readily sided with him, and exulted in the thought, that this despised monarch would now be destroyed.

The Psalm, though primarily applicable to that occasion, was really, as Paul tells us, of a general import. See verses 2-3 with [Romans 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-12). And therefore, taking the text in that view, I will explain, and vindicate, the counsel that is here referred to.

I. Explain the text.

The people designated as "the poor," are **the Lord's people generally**.

It is certain that the great mass of the Lord's people are taken from the lower walks of life. There are "not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble, called." In the days of our Lord, it was "not the Scribes and Pharisees that believed on him," but the poor. who were deemed accursed, [John 7:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.49). "The common people heard him gladly, [Mark 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.37)."

But the name is given to the Lord's people principally because they are "poor in spirit, [Isaiah 14:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.32); [Isaiah 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.19). [Zephaniah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.12)," feeling their utter destitution of everything really good; just as a person in the state of Lazarus feels his lack of all the comforts of life. In this sense the name is given to them in a great variety of passages; and throughout the whole world they answer to the character contained in it.

They invariably "make the Lord their refuge".

They feel their lost and undone state; and in themselves they find no remedy. But in Christ they see a fullness and sufficiency, even for the very chief of sinners. They look into the Scriptures, and see the "counsel" given them, to "look to him," and to "flee to him;" and this counsel they both follow themselves, and give to all around them. They determine, both for themselves and for others, to "know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified!"

But this conduct exposes them to much obloquy. I will therefore proceed to,

II. Vindicate the text.

In "frustrating the plans of the poor," the ungodly will pretend to reason with them.

They will deride their plans as unnecessary; since there is no occasion for them to feel any such alarm about their souls. They reprobate it as presumptuous; for, can they suppose that God should pay such peculiar regard to them, to accept them, sanctify them, save them—when all the rest of the world are perishing in their sins? They pour contempt upon it as ineffectual; for to think of setting aside all good works in point of dependence for salvation, can be no other than a desperate delusion Such are the arguments with which the ungodly will endeavor to shame the poor out of their confidence in God.

But we will defend their counsel against all these unjust aspersions.

Their counsel is not unnecessary; for there is not a creature in the universe that can be saved in any other way.

Their counsel is not presumptuous. What presumption is there in believing God's promises, and in obeying his commands, and especially that command of coming to Christ and relying on him alone for salvation, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23).

Their counsel is not ineffectual; for there never was, nor ever shall be—one soul left to perish, that sought for mercy solely and entirely by faith in Christ. The cities of refuge afforded a safe asylum to him who fled from the avenger of blood. Just so, whatever have been the sins of the believing penitent, "he shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

Address,

1. The despisers.

We need not go far to find people of this character. In fact, those who do not follow it, despise this counsel—even though they should never cast any particular reproach on those who adopt it. But, I beg permission to ask, what counsel will you give? Shall it be, to despise all religion? or to rest in outward forms? Or to say, "Lord, Lord, while you do not the things which he says?" You may boldly maintain this counsel now; but will you do it in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment? Know, assuredly, that you will be ashamed of it then, whether you be now, or not.

But that is the only wise counsel which will be accepted by God, and issue in your everlasting salvation. All else is but to "make lies your refuge, and to hide yourselves under falsehood, [Isaiah 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.15);" or, in other words, to "build on a foundation of sand, that will fall," and crush you under its ruins.

2. The despised.

What harm has it done you hitherto, that you have been despised by an ungodly world? Only seek your happiness in God, and you need not mind what man shall say concerning you. Man's judgment is but for "a day, [1 Corinthians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3)—whereas God's judgment will be forever. The Prophets, the Apostles, and our Lord Jesus Christ—were they approved by men? On the contrary, was there anything too bad for men to say concerning them? Be content, then, to be "partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when he shall appear, you may be glad also with exceeding joy! [1 Peter 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13)." In truth, to be despised for righteousness' sake is your highest honor, [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14). [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41), and shall surely issue in your more exalted happiness! [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17).

#510

THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION

**[Psalm 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.7)**

"Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!"

We know not on what occasion this Psalm was written, but there are two things which render it pre-eminently worthy of our attention.

The one is, that, with very little alteration, it is repeated in another Psalm, Psalm 53.

The other is, that a very considerable part of it is cited by the Apostle Paul, not for the mere purpose of illustrating any point, but for establishing that doctrine which lies at the very foundation of Christianity, the universal and total depravity of human nature. Compare verses 1-3 with [Romans 3:10-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-19).

The Psalmist has evidently been reflecting on the extreme wickedness of the human heart, in that men, for the purpose of following their evil ways without fear, would banish God himself from the universe! verse 1; and, by impious derision, drive out all regard for piety from the world! verse 6.

Being oppressed, and overwhelmed, as it were, with this painful contemplation, he breaks forth into this devout rapture, "Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!"

We may conceive him in these words looking forward, not only to the times of the Messiah, but to the Messiah himself, who is frequently designated by the name of Savior, [Isaiah 62:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.11) with [Isaiah 45:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21-22), and who in New Testament, under that character, comes forth out of Zion, [Romans 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.26), and is an object of desire to all nations [Haggai 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.7)." But, perhaps, it is rather "salvation" itself that is here spoken of, and which the Psalmist contemplates.

I. Salvation, as an object of desire.

And truly so it is,

1. To the world at large.

View the state of the world, especially as it is described in the Psalm before us—how inexpressibly awful! And how fully is this description verified in all around us!

Respecting the heathen world, we are willing enough to acknowledge the truth of the accusation; but, respecting the professing Christian world, we are ready to conceive of it as exaggerated and false. But Paul quotes these very expressions to prove the wickedness of all mankind; and the smallest measure of candid observation will confirm all that he has spoken.

Say, then, whether salvation is not needed; and whether the Psalmist's wish should not be the most ardent desire of our souls, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" The Gospel brings precisely such a salvation as men's necessities require; and happy would it be, if its blessings were proclaimed to the utmost ends of the earth!

2. To every heavy-laden sinner.

Are any of you convinced of your sinful and undone state? Consider the remedy provided for you. O how precious should it be to your souls! How infinitely dearer to you than thousands of silver and gold! As great as your guilt undoubtedly is, it may all be washed away in the Redeemer's blood; and as deeply-rooted as your corruptions are, they may all be rooted out by the operation of his holy Spirit on your souls. Reconciliation is made through the blood of the cross; so that God, from being your enemy—is ready to become your Father and your friend! And, if only you embrace the salvation offered to you in the Gospel, all the glory of Heaven shall be yours! Cherish, then, this holy desire; and, in reference to your own souls in particular, be constantly saying, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!"

Realizing in his mind the object of his desire, the Psalmist proceeds to view,

II. Salvation, as actually attained.

Salvation has been effected by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Already salvation has produced great joy in the world.

To a great extent has the captivity of God's spiritual Israel been turned. Thousands and millions, both of Jews and Gentiles, have been delivered from the power of Satan, by whom they were once led captive at his will. And what joy the deliverance occasioned, we well know.

On the day of Pentecost. not less than three thousand, who had been pricked to the heart with a sense of sin, were, by the glad tidings of the Gospel, enabled to eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God. And to this hour do all who hear the joyful sound experience the same holy feeling in their souls. Tell me, you who have ever been released from the bonds of sin and Satan—have you not been constrained to say, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior?"

Yes, in every place where the Gospel comes, and in every bosom where it is received, "the oil of joy is given in the stead of mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

But what joy will it not excite, when salvation shall prevail to its full extent?

There is a period yet future, when the Gospel shall be conveyed to all nations, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Then shall the dominion of Satan be altogether broken, and the whole race of mankind be brought to "serve the living God." What joy shall prevail over the face of the whole earth! Truly the descriptions given of it by the Psalmist will fall infinitely short of the reality, [Psalm 98:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 98.1-9); for Heaven itself will then appear to have come down upon the earth, [Revelation 21:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.2-4), and all the glorified saints to have descended to swell the chorus of the redeemed! [Revelation 20:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.4).

From hence,

1. We learn what **conversion** is.

Whatever mystical representations are given of it, it is simply this, "a turning of us from the captivity" of sin and Satan, and bringing us "into the glorious liberty of the children of God." This it was for which the Savior came into the world; and this it is which he effects, in all who are partakers of his salvation. Let any say whether it is not a proper object of desire, or whether a captive soul can ever desire it too much.

2. We learn that salvation should be our **great aim in life**.

The deliverance, to whoever it is given, is only gradual, "the flesh will yet lust against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh; so that, to the last hour of our lives, we shall not be able to do all that we could wish, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)." Even the Apostle Paul, after having served the Lord for twenty years—yet was constrained to cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me! [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24)." To grow in grace should be the daily object of our ambition; and to "put off the old man, and put on the new," should be the one labor of our souls; nor should we ever cease from this labor, until we have attained the full measure of the stature of Christ.

3. We learn that salvation should **endear the thoughts of death to us**.

Death will break all our chains, and set us at perfect liberty. While here, we still are complaining that "we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins." But no complaint shall ever be heard in Heaven. There we shall be "pure, as Christ is pure;" and "perfect, as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect." Let us learn, then, to look on death as a friend, and to number it among our richest treasures, 1 Corinthians 3:22. That it is disarmed of its sting, is no small part of our present joy; and that it shall translate us into the immediate presence of our God, is sufficient to make us pant for its arrival, "desiring to depart and to be with Christ, as far better" than the happiest lot that can be enjoyed on earth! [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23).

#511

CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO SHALL BE SAVED

**[Psalm 15:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 15.1-5)**

"O LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?

He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow-man, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken."

In the ministry of the Gospel, every subject must occupy that measure of attention which seems to have been paid to it in the Holy Scriptures. We must not be deterred from speaking of the *principles* of Christianity, because some despise them as evangelical; nor must we omit the *practical parts* of our religion, because others may discard them as legal. We should be equally ready to consider every part of God's revealed will, neither rejecting any, nor magnifying any beyond its due importance.

The Psalm before us is altogether of a practical nature. On what occasion it was written, we are not informed; but we think it probable that it was composed after David had carried up the ark to Mount Zion, and placed it in the tabernacle. From that event, he would be naturally led to reflect on the character of those who would be approved of God in ministering before it, and, consequently, to depict the character of those who should be counted worthy to serve God in his temple above.

Agreeably to this view of the Psalm, we may consider it as containing:

I. An inquiry into the character of those who shall be saved.

We must remember, that the inquiry does not respect the way of salvation, but the character of those who shall be saved. Had it related to the way of salvation, the great doctrines of "repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" must of necessity have been set forth; however they might have been expressed in terms suited to that dispensation, they could not possibly have been omitted. But the inquiry is simply this; What is the character, and what is the conduct—of those who shall be finally admitted into that true tabernacle which God himself has erected in Heaven? Can there be any inquiry more important?

Observe:

1. What is implied in the inquiry itself.

Certainly it implies that all will not be saved. And this is a truth which our blessed Lord has confirmed beyond a doubt, [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14). Some dream of annihilation, and some of Heaven—but what a fearful disappointment will multitudes experience! Yes, "fearfulness will surprise them;" and, instead of dwelling in the bosom of their God, they will "dwell with devouring fire, even with everlasting burnings! [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14)."

2. What is implied in the inquiry as addressed to Jehovah.

It is of Jehovah himself that David makes the inquiry; for it is Jehovah alone that can answer it aright. Man is partial in his own favor; and, even when constrained to acknowledge that there must be a difference between the righteous and the wicked, he takes care to draw the line, so as to include himself among the number that shall be saved. But God has no respect of persons; his Word is fixed; and according to that word shall be the doom of every man!

That we may with certainty determine the point, let us see, in this Psalm,

II. Their character described.

The children of God are here faithfully described:

1. All true believers will have **a principle of integrity in their hearts**.

It is the very essence of the Christian character to have righteousness and truth residing in the soul; we must be "Israelites indeed, in whom is no deceit." Where a principle of integrity is lacking, nothing can be right. Religious services, of whatever kind, are of no account with God—if there is not a determination of heart to do whatever he commands. A single eye is that which he approves; and the lack of it vitiates all that a man can do, yes, and renders it odious in his sight! [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3). We are aware that these assertions are strong; but they do not in the least exceed the truth. John's declarations leave us no room to doubt, "He who practices righteousness, is righteous, even as He (that is, Christ himself,) is righteous, [1 John 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.4); [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6); [1 John 3:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.6-10)."

The object of the Christian's desires, yes, and of his endeavors too, is universal holiness. He would in all things, as far as possible, "be conformed to Christ," "having the same mind as was in him," and "walking in all things as he walked." He would not willingly retain a right hand or a right eye that caused him to offend; his one labor and ambition is, to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." It is in this way that he "puts on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and it is in this way that "Christ becomes all in all! See [Romans 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.14) and [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.11); which passages refer, the one to the graces of Christ in the soul, and the other to the image of Christ in the soul."

2. All true believers will have **a corresponding conduct in their lives**.

The particular things enumerated by the Psalmist are for the most part overlooked, as though they were of minor importance; but, in truth, they enter deeply into the Christian character, and will serve as most decisive tests of the existence and measure of our integrity. In true Christians, then, the following marks are found:

Genuine Christians will not practice uncharitable censures. Among false professors, even as among the ungodly world, there is a lamentable lack of tenderness to the characters of others; they will receive, and circulate, a false report, without ever considering how great an injury they do to him who is thus calumniated. They will allow their minds to be prejudiced against a brother without any just occasion; and will even feel more alienation from him on account of some quality which they disapprove, than attachment to him for many qualities which render him worthy of their esteem. But the true Israelite will not deal out such measure to his neighbors; he will rather put a favorable construction on the things which admit of doubt, and cast a veil over the faults which are too plain to be denied. He will in this matter conform himself to the golden rule, of 'Doing to others as he would have them do to him.'

Genuine Christians will practice equity in estimating the characters of men. They will not be lenient towards offences in the rich, which they condemn with severity in the poor; nor will they allow their regards to be influenced by the pride of life or the prejudice of party. Magistrates, indeed, they will reverence as bearing an authority vested in them by God himself; but it is the office that they will reverence; just as Paul reverenced the high priest, notwithstanding the injustice with which he executed his high office. But the despisers of God will, as such, be pitied and contemned by every true Christian; and those who fear God will on that account be loved and honored by him, whatever station they may fill, or to whatever party they may belong. He will from his inmost soul unite in the Apostle's blessing, "Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

Genuine Christians will practice strict adherence to all their engagements. No believer will think lightly of his word, and still less of his oath. If he has promised anything, he will on no account go back, even though the performance of the promise should involve him in considerable difficulty. In all financial or commercial transactions, his word will be his bond; no subterfuges will be resorted to, no equivocations, no falsehoods invented, to invalidate his engagement. If he has "sworn to his own hurt," he will submit to the consequences, and discharge his conscience with fidelity. With respect to engagements of a yet more sacred nature, he will exercise the utmost scrupulosity; and not because of any change in his own mind, think himself at liberty to renege on any promise. For the true Christian, "his yes must be yes, and his nay, nay."

Genuine Christians will abhor things that are sordid and unjust. Usury was forbidden under the Mosaic Law; and that prohibition, as to the spirit of it, reigns equally under the Gospel. There is a legal interest of money which may fitly and properly be made; but every kind of extortion is worthy of the utmost abhorrence. To take advantage of the ignorance or the necessities of our fellow-creatures, to deceive them in relation to the quality or quantity of the commodities sold to them, to lean unduly to our own interests, and thereby to injure in any respect the interests of others—all this is contrary to the law of love, the law of honesty; and the man who for filthy lucre sake will condescend to such baseness, is unworthy of the Christian name!

It matters not what profession of religion he may make, nor how high he may stand in the estimation of those who are unacquainted with his character; he has "the mark of the beast upon him," and will assuredly take his "portion among the hypocrites!"

We are aware that many religionists will call this statement legal; but let them remember that Paul himself has given this very description of the Christian's conduct, and has declared, that "those who are children of the light will walk in all goodness, and righteousness and truth, [Ephesians 5:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.8-10)." By these fruits must they be judged of, and "by these fruits must they be known."

In relation to people of this character, we behold with pleasure,

III. Their salvation assured.

Our blessed Lord represents them as people whose habitation is founded on a rock, [Matthew 7:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.24-27); and their perseverance and preservation are assured to them:

1. By the very graces which they exercise.

We do not mean to say, that any man, however eminent, has in himself such a measure of grace, as shall be a safeguard to him under all temptations; for even Paul himself had not in himself "a sufficiency even to think a good thought;" nor can any man persevere one moment longer, than God shall be pleased to uphold him in his everlasting arms; but still God himself has represented "righteousness as a breastplate," which will resist the darts of our great adversary. It must be obvious, that they, in whom there is a principle of universal holiness, and whose conduct is so strictly regulated by the commands of God, must be comparatively out of the reach of the tempter.

In matters of daily occurrence, the believer will still have within himself an evidence that he is a fallen creature; he will still be subject to mistakes, and infirmities, and falls; but he will not so fall as to return to the willful practice of iniquity, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9), nor so be moved as to "turn back unto perdition."

2. By the express promises of God.

Were the Christian's preservation to depend solely on the strength of the gracious principle within him—he would have but little hope of enduring to the end; but God has encouraged us to exert ourselves, and to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;" in the full persuasion, that "he will give us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

In the Scriptures, both Prophets and Apostles concur in giving us this assurance.

Isaiah speaks almost the very language of our text; he draws the very same character almost in the very same terms; and then declares, that this person "shall dwell on high," (even "in God's holy hill,") that "his place of defense shall be the munition of rocks; that bread shall be given him, and his waters shall be sure, [Isaiah 33:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.15-16)."

To the same effect Peter speaks; he bids us add to our faith the practice of all social virtues; and then he tells us that "those who do such things shall never fall, ('never be moved,') but shall have an entrance ministered unto them abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, [2 Peter 1:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.5-11)."

How "exceeding great and precious are such promises" as these! How delightful is it to hear God himself engaging to "keep the feet of his saints," and that "the righteous shall hold on his way, and that he who has clean hands (the very people described in our text) shall wax stronger and stronger, [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9)." Let this then stir us up to walk worthy of our high calling; and let us "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord! [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

#512

SUPERIOR BLESSEDNESS OF TRUE CHRISTIANS

**[Psalm 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.4)**

"The sorrows of those who run after other gods will be multiplied."

There is not, in all the writings of the Old Testament, a portion of Scripture that more fully attests the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus than this chapter. All depended on his resurrection from the dead. And to this Psalm both Peter, at the commencement of his ministry to the Jews, [Acts 2:25-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.25-32), and Paul, on his first solemn mission to preach to the Gentiles, made their appeal as predicting the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day, [Acts 13:31-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.31-37). In the beginning of the Psalm, David speaks more particularly respecting himself; but even there he declares the blessedness of the Lord's people, and especially of those who were looking forward to the Messiah, beyond all the worshipers of false gods. The contrast which he there forms, will be the subject of our present meditations.

To elucidate it, I will,

I. Confirm the assertion in my text.

It is universally true that "The sorrows of those who run after other gods will be multiplied."

1. We see this among the **pagans**.

They worship gods of wood and stone, hence their sorrows are universally and greatly multiplied. The very instant they begin to feel a sense of guilt upon their souls, there is nothing so painful but they will do it, in order to conciliate the favor of their gods. The offering of human sacrifices, to which I apprehend the Psalmist refers (see the words following our text,) which refer to the cruel and idolatrous usages of the Canaanites, the very names of whose idols were forbidden to be named, sufficiently attests this. Just so, the self-devotion of those who, at this day, cast themselves under the wheels of the temple of Juggernaut, in order to sacrifice their lives to that detestable idol, places beyond a doubt the miseries sustained by idolaters, even where civilization is in other respects is considerably advanced.

2. We see this among the **votaries of this world**.

Look at those who are "enslaved by all kinds of lusts and pleasures," and seeking happiness in the gratification of their own evil passions.

Is the licentious fornicator, or the base adulterer, happy? No! They hate the light; they are ashamed to be seen in the pursuit of their unhallowed practices; and they contract a load of guilt, which, in hours of reflection, surely oppresses their minds, and renders them afraid to meet God!

Even in temporal matters, the follower of forbidden pleasures often suffers to a great extent; and what he suffers in the eternal world, let the Rich Man, who disregarded the plight of Lazarus, attest. Truly, whether pleasures, riches, or honors are thus idolized, they heap distress and anguish on their votaries, both in this world and in the world to come.

3. We see this among the **followers of a legal and Pharisaic righteousness**.

This, too, is idolatry, no less than the indulgence of covetousness, lewdness, or any other corrupt propensity. And what a load, yes, what an insupportable burden, does it entail! The Pharisees of old were far from happy; and so are the Papists now; for, while they have recourse to rites of man's device, instead of seeking acceptance through the sin-atoning blood of Christ, they put their own good works in the place of Christ's, and accumulate to themselves sorrows without end!

But what shall we say of the disappointment they will feel on entering into the judgement of God? They thought to purchase Heaven; but the inadequacy of their efforts will instantly appear, and the impiety of their conceits be visited with suitable expressions of God's merited indignation!

Connected as this assertion is with all the following context, I shall be led to,

II. Contrast the state of idolaters, with the state of the Lord's redeemed people.

If it is true that "The sorrows of those who run after other gods will be multiplied," then it is no less true, on the other hand, that the joys of those who hasten after the Lord "Jesus Christ, who is the true God and eternal life," shall be multiplied, [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20). Yes, truly, they shall greatly rejoice; as it is said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice."

1. The Lord's redeemed people are blessed with **peace of conscience**.

This is unknown to any human being, except to him who believes in Christ. Others may have the insensibility of beasts, or the confidence of fanatics—but the tranquility of mind which arises from a sense of God's pardoning love upon the soul is altogether unknown to them. They possess it not. They cannot possess it, because God is not in reality reconciled towards them. There are no means of acceptance with God, but those provided in his Gospel; and, whether men are rejecting his Gospel as infidels, or substituting something else in the place of it—they are equally cut off from all hope of its benefits. But the believer in Christ is fully accepted by his God; and, "being justified by faith, he has peace with God!" He may say, with undoubting assurance, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance! verse 5."

2. The Lord's redeemed people are blessed with **holiness of heart and life**.

Here, also, the believer stands elevated above all the rest of mankind. Others may be fair as whited sepulchers; but the believer is "renewed in his inward man," and transformed into the divine image in righteousness and true holiness." Need I say what a source of happiness this is? The prophet tells us, that "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever, [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17)." And to the same effect the Psalmist, speaking in his own as well as in the Messiah's name, informs us, "I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my flesh also shall rest in hope! verse 8, 9."

3. The Lord's redeemed people are blessed with the **hope and assurance of everlasting glory**.

He has a title to eternal life, and even the begun possession of it in his soul, [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36). [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12). Hence, in the language of David and the Messiah himself, he is privileged to say, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand! Verse 16." As to the full enjoyment of Heaven, I cannot attempt to describe it. No words can paint it; no imagination can conceive of it. But it shall be the assured and everlasting possession of all who sincerely believe in Christ.

What, then, shall I say?

"Hasten after" this blessed Savior, determining never to relax your diligence, until you have fully "apprehended him, and been finally apprehended of him."

See what exertions the pagans make, in order to please their gods of wood and stone.

See, too, with what indefatigable zeal the worldling serves his gods, accounting his whole life little enough for the attainment of the object of his pursuit, whether it is pleasure, or riches, or honor.

See also the self-denying exercises of him who is laboring to establish a righteousness of his own, instead of submitting to the righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ.

Shall any of these do more for their gods than you for yours? Shall not the Savior of your souls be counted worthy of all that can possibly be done or suffered for him? I say, look at the earnestness of others in the service of false gods, and stand amazed at your lukewarmness in the service of him who has redeemed you to God by his own most precious blood. There is nothing which idolaters of all the different classes will not "give to their respective gods." Just so, let there be nothing withheld from your Lord and Savior; yes, give your whole selves to him; and let your whole body, soul, and spirit, be sanctified to him, henceforth, and for evermore!

#513

GOD HIMSELF HIS PEOPLE'S PORTION

**[Psalm 16:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.5-7)**

"O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance. I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons."

This Psalm is called "Michtam," that is, A golden Psalm. And a golden Psalm it is, whether we interpret it of David, or of Christ. To both it is applicable; to David, as a type of Christ; and to Christ, as so typified. In all the Word of God there is not a passage on which greater stress is laid, as establishing beyond a doubt the Messiahship of Jesus; to whom alone the latter part of the Psalm can with any truth be literally applied, [Acts 2:25-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.25-31); [Acts 13:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.35-37).

The former part of it, on the contrary, is much more applicable to David himself. The truth is, I apprehend, that David began to write respecting himself; but was overruled and inspired to speak things which he himself did not fully comprehend, and to declare literally respecting the Messiah, what was only in a very lax sense true in relation to himself.

This we know to have been the case with the prophets generally; they were inspired to predict the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow, while they themselves understood not their own prophecies, [1 Peter 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-12). They spoke of one point which was uppermost in their own minds; and God overruled them to speak in language that was applicable rather to another point which he had ordained them to foretell.

Thus did Caiaphas the high priest, when advising that Jesus should be put to death, [John 11:49-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.49-52). And thus did David, in this and several other of his Psalms: Psalm 22, 40 and 69. We consider the words of our text, together with all that precedes it, as spoken by David respecting himself; and in them we see,

I. The blessed portion of God's people.

They have "God himself for their portion and their inheritance".

There seems, in this expression, some reference to the custom which prevailed of sending to different guests, when assembled at a feast, such a portion as the Master of the feast judged expedient, [Genesis 43:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 43.34). [1 Samuel 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.4-5). But the principal allusion evidently is to the division of the land of Canaan by lot, and the assigning to all the different tribes the portion prepared for them. On that occasion the tribe of Levi was distinguished from all the other tribes in this: that whereas all the rest had a distinct and separate inheritance allotted to them, they had none; the Lord himself vouchsafing to be their inheritance, [Numbers 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.20). [Deuteronomy 18:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.1-2). The sacrifices which from time to time were offered to the Lord were appointed for their support.

Now, in allusion to this, David says, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup." He was not of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah; and therefore respecting him it could be true only in a spiritual and mystical sense; and in that sense it is equally true respecting every genuine believer at this day. We are all "a kingdom of priests;" and we live altogether upon the great sacrifice, even the flesh of Christ, and the blood of Christ, which were offered for the sins of men. By the very terms of the New Covenant, God, while he takes us for his people, gives himself to us as our God, [Jeremiah 31:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31-33); so that all who believe in Jesus may claim him as their God." This, I say, is not the privilege of Prophets and Apostles only, but of even the weakest believer in the Church of God; for we are expressly told, that "to as many as received him, Jesus gave power to become the sons of God, even to those who believed on his name, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12)." The very instant they believed in Christ, the relation between God and them was formed, and God became their Father, their Friend, their Portion, "their eternal great reward, [Genesis 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.1)." To us then belongs this privilege as well as to David; and with him we may say, "O my soul, you have said unto the Lord, You are my Lord! verse 2."

This portion too is secured to them.

Israel in Canaan were surrounded with enemies on every side; but God, who had allotted to every tribe its portion, engaged to "maintain their lot." Even when all the males assembled thrice a year at Jerusalem, God undertook to be a Protector of their families and their possessions; and to this hour they would have enjoyed their inheritance, if they had not by their transgressions provoked God to forsake them.

But true believers who have him for our inheritance—he will not forsake; as he has said, "The Lord will not forsake his people; because it has pleased him to make you his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22);" and again, "I will never leave you; I will never, never forsake you! [Hebrews 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.3); [Hebrews 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.6)." Not but that he will punish us for our transgressions; and so punish, as to make us feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from him; but his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from us, nor allow his truth to fail, [Psalm 89:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-35)."

It is not with us as with Israel in Canaan; they were left to forfeit and to lose their lot; but God, in his mercy, engages to preserve our inheritance for us, and us for it, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5); and not only "never to depart from us, but so to put his fear in our hearts that we may not depart from him! [Jeremiah 32:38-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.38-40)."

Such then is your portion, O believer; and such is your security that it shall be continued to you!

If such is the inheritance of all God's people—then we shall not wonder then at,

II. The feelings which true believers have in the contemplation of their inheritance.

1. David expresses **delight** in his inheritance.

All the pious among the Israelites would find some reason to be pleased and delighted with the portion that was assigned them. To some their proximity to the sea would be a matter of joy; to others, their pasturage; to others, their rocks and fortresses; so that all in their respective places would say, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance."

But how well may they adopt that language who have the Lord for their portion! Tell me, believer, what else can you want? What can add anything unto you? What is there which you do not find in your God? If you possess ever so great a portion of earthly goods, are they not all as dung and dross in comparison with this? Or, if you are destitute even as Lazarus himself, is not all sense of indigence lost in the contemplation of your better wealth? What the worldling has, he holds by a very uncertain tenure, and that only for a moment. But what you have is secured to you by the promise and oath of God, and is to be enjoyed by you with ever-augmenting zest forever and ever.

Do you not, in this survey of your inheritance, pity those who can rest in any earthly portion? Are you not ready to weep over those as maniacs, who imagine themselves kings and emperors, while they are but little elevated above the beasts; yes, in some respects inferior to them; because they fulfill in a far less degree the true ends of their creation?

Well indeed may you exult when you survey your portion! When you behold the sun and moon and stars, together with this globe whereon you stand, and call to mind that the Maker of them all is your Friend, your Portion, your Inheritance; methinks it is almost strange that the contemplation is not too much for frail mortality to bear. To be lost in wonder, and be swallowed up in ecstasy, is no more than what may be expected of you from day to day!

2. David expresses **thankfulness** to God for his inheritance.

David clearly saw that of himself he would never have chosen such a portion as this. His earthly mind would have been as groveling as that of others, if God himself had not "counseled him," and discovered to him the vanity of all earthly good. Amidst the various trials which he had endured, God had drawn near to him; and in the night-seasons of affliction God had instructed him, and had revealed himself to him in all his beauty and excellency and glory. Thus he had enabled David to make a fair estimate of the portion offered to him, as compared with that which the world around him enjoyed. In this view of the mercy given unto him, David says, "I will bless the Lord, who has given me counsel; my thoughts also instruct me in the night-seasons."

And is it not thus with every believer? Do you not assuredly know that of yourselves you would never have chosen God for your portion? Are you not well convinced, that you would "not have chosen him if he had not chosen you;" nor "loved him, if he had not first loved you?" Did you not even hold out against his counsels for a long time, until he forced conviction on your mind, and "made you willing in the day of his power?" If you have been kept awake in the night-seasons, and "your thoughts instructed you," until with a conviction you were "cut to the heart!" Or, if you have been visited with trials that were necessary to wean you from the things of time and sense—do you not bless him for it, and for "the instruction which he then sealed upon your mind, [Job 33:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.15-20)." Yes, and with your whole hearts. You see in what a portion you would have rested, if these means had not been used to bring you to a better mind; and, if they had been a thousand times heavier than they were, you would now account them as unworthy of a thought, in comparison with the blessings to the possession of which they have introduced you. I hear you adoring God, and saying, "I know that in very faithfulness you afflicted me;" for "before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept your law." Go on, then, blessing and praising God; and never forget that "by the grace of God you are what you are!"

III. To those who do not have God as their portion, I will "give a word of counsel" in the name of the Lord.

Survey the portion of the worldling, and see how empty it is! Look back on all the worldly pleasures which you have enjoyed, and see how little solid and lasting comfort it has afforded.

Then survey "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Think what it must be to say of God, "O God, you are my God!" And of Christ, "You are my Friend, and my Beloved!"

Then turn to the Holy Scriptures, and see what counsel God has given you there, "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare! [Isaiah 55:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-2)." Nothing does God desire more than to give himself to you for a portion, if you will but receive him. He complains, "You will not come unto me that you may have life!" "How often would I have gathered you, and given myself to you, but you would not!"

Dear friends, let God choose your inheritance for you; and he will be as much delighted to enrich your souls, as ever you can be to be enriched by him. Indeed by imparting himself to you, he himself will be enriched; for he regards you as his property, and says of you, "The Lord's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance, [Deuteronomy 32:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9)."

IV. To those who already enjoy this portion, I will offer a word of encouragement.

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance, [Psalm 33:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.12). Yes, "Happy are you, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord, [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)." I ask not what you possess, or what you want; if you had empires, they could add nothing to you; and if you want bread to eat, it can take but little from you. Look at Paul and Silas when in prison, and their backs torn with scourges—yet their situation was to them as "the very gate of Heaven! [Acts 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.25)." Just so, if only you live near to God, and in the near prospect of the eternal world, you also shall be happy under all circumstances whatever.

Imitate, for once, the worldling who is just about to take possession of his inheritance; with what joy he surveys it, and anticipates the delight which he will experience in the full possession of it!

Thus go and survey your inheritance. See the state of those who are now possessed of their entire lot. Behold how they feast in the presence of their God! Think, if you can, what God is to them, [Revelation 21:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4-5); and know, that their bliss is yours, in all its fullness, and forever! Think how you will then "bless the Lord for giving you counsel." Live, then, now as people sensible of their privileges; and say, as you may well do, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, and I have a good inheritance."

#514

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND GLORY

**[Psalm 16:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.8-11)**

"I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

If the people of God had hope only in this life, they would be in a most pitiable condition; because they are debarred by conscience from the pleasures of sin, and are exposed to a multitude of trials on account of their religion. But their views of future eternal glory bear them up, so that the sufferings of this present time appear to them insignificant, and unworthy of any serious concern.

The Psalmist penned this Psalm under some deep affliction; which, however, lost all its force as soon as ever he directed his views to the eternal world.

But the words before us can scarcely be applied at all to David in his own person; they are spoken by him rather in the person of Christ, whom he typically represented; and to whom, in the New Testament, they are expressly, repeatedly, and exclusively applied. In this view they are a most remarkable prophecy relating to Christ; and they declare,

I. Christ's support in life.

In an assurance of his Father's continual aid, Jesus was unmoved by any difficulties.

Various were the trials which Jesus was called to endure; but in all he preserved a perfect equanimity. When his sufferings were fast approaching, he spoke of them without any emotions of fear, [Matthew 20:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.18-19). When dissuaded from exposing himself to them, he was indignant at the proposal, [Matthew 16:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.22-23). When warned of Herod's murderous intentions, he poured contempt on his feeble, unavailing efforts, [Luke 13:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.31-33). When standing before Pilate's tribunal, he witnessed a good confession, [John 18:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.37). [1 Timothy 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.13); and, alike unmoved by hopes or fears, informed his judge, that the authority exercised by him was both given, and limited, by a superior power, [John 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.11).

He saw God as ever present to aid and support him; and was well assured, that as nothing could be done but according to his determinate counsel, so God's aid should be all-sufficient for him! [Psalm 89:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.21). [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1). Hence in the whole of his deportment he maintained an invincible firmness, and a dignified composure. At all times he acted on the principles described by the Prophet Isaiah, and fulfilled in the utmost extent his prophecy concerning him, [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9).

Nor need the weakest of Christ's redeemed people fear, if they look for support from the same quarter.

Many of God's people have experienced the very same divine support as was enjoyed by Christ. David's friends endeavored to create in his mind desponding fears; but his confidence in an almighty Protector kept him steadfast, [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4); and determined him to preserve an undaunted spirit, however great or multiplied his trials might be, [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1); [Psalm 27:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.3). Paul also, in the view of certain and accumulated troubles, could say, "None of these things move me! [Acts 20:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.23-24)."

Thus may every believer triumph. The man who trusts in God is in an impregnable fortress which has salvation for walls and bulwarks, [Isaiah 26:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.1). [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1), [Psalm 125:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.2). If only our eyes are opened to see clearly, we may behold ourselves, like Elisha, encompassed with chariots of fire and horses of fire; and may laugh at the impotent attempts of men or devils! [2 Kings 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.16-17).

The more immediate scope of the prophecy is to declare,

II. Christ's comfort in death.

Our blessed Lord submitted cheerfully to his death in a certain expectation of a speedy resurrection.

His last discourses, and his intercessory prayer, abundantly testify the composure of his spirit, and the elevation of his mind. Do we look for the ground of his consolation? We shall find it in those repeated expressions, "I go to my Father;" "Father, I come to you, [John 16:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.28); [John 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.11)." He knew that his flesh which he gave for the life of the world, [John 6:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.51), would never become decay and corruption. Christ's resurrection on the third day was typified by that ordinance of the law, [Leviticus 7:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.17-18); but that, though immured in the silent tomb, it should be raised thence, before it could corrupt; and that his soul, though separate from it for a season, should soon be re-united to it, to be a joint partaker of the same kingdom and glory.

Such consolation too, have all his members in a dying hour.

Christ rose, not as a private individual, but as "the first-fruits of those who slept, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20)." And everyone that believes in him may consider death as a sleep, and the grave as a bed whereon he is to rest, [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60). [Isaiah 57:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.2), until the morning of the resurrection. The bodies of the saints are indeed doomed to death and corruption on account of sin, [Romans 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.10); but they shall be raised again, and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21). "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory." [1 Corinthians 15:53-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.53-54).

In expectation of this, the martyrs of old would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection, [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35); and, in the hope of it, we also may put off this tabernacle with joy, knowing that it shall be raised anew in a far better form [2 Corinthians 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1-2)."

Connected with this hope in his death, we behold,

III. Christ's prospect in eternity.

The state to which Jesus was to rise, was a state of inconceivable and endless glory.

No sooner were death and the grave vanquished by Jesus in the resurrection, and he was thereby "declared to be the Son of God with power," than the way to the regions of glory was opened to him; that way, which, with myriads of attendant angels, he trod soon afterwards, that he might receive all the fruits of his victorious death. Then he sat down at the right hand of his Father, not any more to taste a cup of sorrow, but to possess a fullness and perpetuity of unutterable joy. Blessed prospect! Well might he be animated by it in the midst of all his trials; and, for the joy set before him, endure the cross, and despise the shame! [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2).

Such too, are the delightful prospects of all his saints.

They see, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the way to Heaven opened; and, if they look to him as the resurrection and the life, [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26), a fullness and perpetuity of joy awaits them also at their departure hence. Who can conceive what happiness they will feel in the vision and fruition of their God, [Revelation 21:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.3-4); [Revelation 21:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.21-22). Well may believers long "to depart, that they may be with Christ;" and account all their afflictions to be light and momentary, in the view of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory with which they will be crowned in the day of the Lord Jesus! 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

Inferences:

1. What rich sources of consolation does faith open to believers under all their troubles!

Faith beholds God always present and always active to support his redeemed people. Faith also looks forward to the future state both of body and soul, enabling us to weigh the concerns of time and eternity in the scale together, and thereby to see the vanity of the one in comparison with the other. To be happy, therefore, we must live by faith.

2. How certain is the salvation of those who believe in Christ!

If Jesus is the Messiah, and has in himself a sufficiency for the salvation of his people, then have we nothing to do but to believe in him. But Peter, quoting the entire text, infers from it the certainty of his Messiahship, [Acts 2:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.25-28); [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.36); and Paul, referring to the same, infers his sufficiency to save his people, [Acts 13:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.35-39). Let us then make him our refuge, our foundation, and our ALL.

#515

MEN OF GOD CONTRASTED TO MEN OF THIS WORLD

**[Psalm 17:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.14-15)**

"With your hand, O Lord, save me from men of this world whose portion is in this life." [Psalm 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.14)

"As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with your likeness!" [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15)

In respect of outward appearance, there is but little difference between "the man of God," and "the men of this world"; But, in their inward principle, they are as far asunder as light from darkness.

I. The Psalmist here contrasts them in their **desires**.

1. The **men of this world** desire only the fleeting things of time and sense.

They have their portion in this life. Pleasure, riches, honor, are the great objects on which their affections are set, and in the attainment of which they suppose happiness to consist. For these they labor with incessant care; and if they may but transmit this portion in rich abundance to their children, they bless themselves, as having well discharged the offices of life.

2. The **man of God** has his affection set rather upon invisible and eternal realities.

There is a remarkable decision manifest in that expression, "As for me," I will do so and so. It resembles the determination of Joshua; who, if all Israel should forsake the Lord, declared this to be his fixed resolution, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

In that other expression, too, "I will behold your face in righteousness," there is, I think, a peculiar delicacy and beauty. It is not merely "I will seek your favor," or, "I will follow after righteousness." But:

"I will seek your favor in the only way in which it can ever be obtained; namely, in an entire resignation to your holy will, as revealed in your blessed Word."

In this view it imports, "I will seek your favor in the way of penitential sorrow; for how shall an impenitent sinner ever find acceptance with you?"

"I will seek it in a way of believing confidence; for you are never more pleased than when a perfect reliance is placed on your dear Son, and in your promises, which in him are yes, and in him Amen"

"I will seek it in a way of incessant watchfulness; for if I practice iniquity in my life, or regard it in my heart—you can never receive me to mercy."

"I will seek it also in a way of universal holiness; for it is the obedient soul alone on which you can ever look with delight and delight."

We do not at all mean to say that "the man of God is perfect;" for there is yet much imperfection cleaving to him. But we do say, that in the habitual desires and purposes of his soul, he accords with the description here given.

II. The Psalmist contrasts them in their **prospects**.

1. **The men of this world** can hope for nothing but disappointment.

Admitting that they attain the summit of their ambition, they only grasp a shadow. Possess what they may, they feel an aching void, a secret something unpossessed, "In the midst of their sufficiency, they are in straits."

As for an eternal state, they do not desire to think of it; their happiness depends on banishing it from their thoughts; and if at any time it obtrudes itself upon their minds, it brings a cloud over their brightest prospects, and casts a damp over their richest enjoyments.

2. Not so with **the man of God**; his pursuits are productive of the most solid satisfaction.

Even in this life he has a portion which he accounts better than ten thousand worlds; so that in him is fulfilled what our blessed Lord has spoken, "He who comes to me, shall never hunger; and he who believes in me, shall never thirst." He has gained a superiority to earthly things, which no other man, whatever he may boast, is able to attain.

But when, at the resurrection of the just, he shall "awake" to a new and heavenly state—how rich will be his satisfaction then! Then he will "behold God face to face;" then, too, he will have attained God's perfect image in his soul; and then he will possess all the glory and felicity of Heaven. Could we but follow him into the presence of his God, and behold him in the full enjoyment of all that he here desired and pursued, methinks we should every one of us adopt the Psalmist's determination, and say, "As for me, this shall be my one desire, my uniform endeavor, and the one great object of my whole life!"

Observe,

1. How wise is the Christian's **choice**!

The world may deride it as folly, but I appeal to every man who possesses the least measure of common sense, whether he does not in his heart approve the very things which with his lips he ventures to condemn? Yes; there is not one, however averse he may be to live the Christian's life, who does not wish to "die his death." Nor is there one, however he may dislike the Christian's way, who does not wish, if it were possible, to resemble him in his end. Let it be a fixed principle, then, in all your minds, that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

2. How blessed is the Christian's **way**!

Because the Christian renounces the vanities of the world, those who have no other source of happiness than the world, imagine that he is deprived of all his pleasures. But we might as well represent a philosopher as robbed of his happiness, because he has ceased to amuse himself with the trifles which pleased him in the years of childhood. The Christian has lost his taste for the vanities which he has renounced, "While he was a child, he occupied himself as a child; but when he became a man, he put away childish things." He now has other pursuits, and other pleasures, more worthy of his advanced age, and more befitting his enlarged mind. When the question is asked, "Who will show us any good?" His answer is, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon me!"

Know then, brethren, that, however deeply the Christian may mourn over his short-comings and defects, and however badly he may be treated by an ungodly world, he is incomparably happier than any ungodly man can be!

What does our blessed Lord say to "the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted because of righteousness?"

"Blessed, blessed, blessed—are you all."

On the contrary, upon the lover of this world, he denounces nothing but, "Woe! Woe! Woe!" Be assured, then, that they only are blessed who seek the Lord; and that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward"

#516

GOD THE ALL-SUFFICIENT PORTION OF HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 18:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.1-3)**

"I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies."

From the persecutions of God's saints in former ages, we derive this most important benefit—we see what was the power of divine grace in them for their support, and what its efficacy was to purify and exalt their souls.

Had David never been oppressed by Saul, and never been driven from his throne by Absalom—then what loss should we have sustained, in those devout compositions which were written in the midst of his trials, and which have brought down to us all the workings of his mind under them! In truth, no one can understand the Psalms of David, so as to enter into the spirit of them, unless he have been called, in some considerable degree, to suffer for righteousness' sake.

The Psalm before us was penned by David as an acknowledgment of the deliverances that had been given to him from the hands of Saul, and of all his other enemies. A sublimer composition can scarcely be found, in all the records of antiquity.

In the words which we have just read, we see,

I. An outpouring of David's gratitude.

His mind was evidently full of his subject. He had been contemplating the wonderful goodness of God to him; and he bursts forth into this devout rapture, "I love you, O LORD, my strength!" Commentators have observed that the word which is here used, expresses all that is tender and affectionate, and implies in it the strongest emotion of the soul. And this was justly called forth by:  
his view of the divine perfections, and  
by his sense of God's unbounded kindness towards him.

And if he, from a sense of temporal mercies, was so inflamed with love to God—then what should we feel towards our incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ, in a review of all the wonders of Redeeming Love?

View the Savior in his personal excellencies; and then say what should be our feelings towards him.

View him in the offices which he has sustained to us, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his church; and then think what are the praises which befit you!

View him in the blessings you have already experienced at his hands; and, while you adopt the language of the prophet, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength," tell me with what frame of mind you should utter these words: It is said that, "not having seen him, we nevertheless love him; and that, believing in him, we rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory!" I am sure, that the glorified saints around the throne should scarcely exceed us in the ardor of our affections, while we exclaim, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you!"

In this, then, the Psalmist should be a pattern to us. We should be so in the habit of contemplating the Savior's love, that the involuntary outpouring of our souls should be, "I do love you, and I will love you, O Lord, my strength. Yes, I will love you with all the powers of my soul!" This, I say, should be the language of our souls, when our feelings, too big for utterance, can at last find vent in words.

In connection with this rapturous exclamation we have,

II. A profession of David's faith.

David, from diversified trials, was forced to become a man of war; and to seek, by a mixture of courage and of skill, a deliverance from his enemies. Under the persecutions of Saul especially, he had recourse to strongholds and fortresses, where he might withstand his too powerful oppressor. But it was in God alone that he really found protection. As means, he had availed himself of local advantages, and personal courage, and armor both of a defensive and offensive kind—but it was God alone who had rendered them effectual for his preservation; and therefore he gives all the glory to God, saying, "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!"

And shall not we, who have so much stronger enemies to contend with, acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as standing in all these relations to us for our salvation?

Yes, in truth, long ago would our great adversary the devil have prevailed against us, if our adorable Emmanuel had not interposed for our deliverance.

In him we have found refuge from all the curses of God's broken law.

By him have we been strengthened in our inner man.

From him have we received our spiritual armor, by which we have been enabled to maintain our conflict with all the enemies of our salvation.

If we have been "strong, it has been in the Lord; and in the power of his might;" and it is he who must have all the glory for our preservation.

Behold, then, in what terms we should give glory to our great deliverer! We should acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as our "all in all!" And while we give him the glory of all that we have already received, we should trust him for all our future conflicts; and contemplating fully all the powers that there are in him, we should learn to appropriate all of them to ourselves, and to say, "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

There should not be anything in the Lord Jesus Christ but we should make it our own by faith, and claim it as our own in all the conflicts to which we may be called; and in every time of trial we should address him in the words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

To this the blessed Psalmist adds,

III. A declaration of his purpose.

He did not think that God's relation to him would justify remissness or negligence on his part. On the contrary, he regarded it as his encouragement to call upon the Lord, as a pledge to him of certain success.

And we, too, must bear in mind, that all our mercies must be obtained by prayer; and that in no other way can we hope to be saved from our enemies.

We see how David prayed in a time of great trial, "Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!" [Psalm 35:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.1-3)."

It was thus that David brought down support from on high, in every time of need. And it is in the same way that we must obtain help of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Though his promises to us are so free and full—yet "he will be inquired of to do these things for us, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37);" and "if we ask not, then neither shall we receive."

Moreover, we must acknowledge him in all that we have already received, and confess him as "worthy to be praised;" for the command is, "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." It is in this way alone that victory can be secured; but if we use these means, we are certain to obtain it. If we live in the habit of fervent and believing prayer, we may, in the midst of conflicts, exult as "more than conquerors;" and behold, by anticipation, our great adversary as already "bruised under our feet! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

From this sublime passage we may see,

1. The true nature of vital religion.

Vital religion is not wholly speculative, nor is it altogether practical—but a compound, if I may so say, of theory and of practice. We must have knowledge, even a knowledge of God in all his perfections, and of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his offices. Without this, there can be no right feeling towards the Supreme Being; no love towards him, no confidence in him, no communion with him.

But with just views of God, we must also have suitable dispositions towards him. In a word, we must have an experience similar to that of David in our text, affecting from our inmost souls a life:  
of communion with God,  
of dependence on him, and  
of devotedness to his service.

Beloved brethren, rest not in anything short of this. Let your meditations on God be sweet and frequent; and let them be renewed, until they have kindled a flame of love in your souls towards him, and until the daily language of your heart is, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"

2. The folly of those who do not seek God.

Compare the Psalmist's experience with your own. What refuge do you have in a time of trouble, or what comfort do you have in reflecting upon God? Alas! instead of the blessed language of David, you must rather say, "O God, I behold nothing in you that I can appropriate to myself; nothing but what may well fill me with alarm and terror!" As for love to God, you know not what it means; and you have not the smallest ground for confidence in him; no, nor have you any access to him in the hour of necessity. Hence you are a prey to your enemies, and "are led captive by the devil at his will."

Unhappy creatures! You may hide yourselves from the danger to which you are exposed; but your state is only the more pitiable in proportion as you are lulled in fatal security. If they are right who resemble the Psalmist—then you can have no clearer evidence that you yourselves are out of the way of peace and salvation.

Were there no future state of existence, your loss would be great even in this world. But when we take eternity into the account, your prospect is terrible indeed!

For if you do not love God now, you cannot love him after you die.

If you do not possess a saving interest in him here—then you can have no interest in him hereafter.

If you do not live near to him in prayer in this world—then you never can unite with the heavenly hosts in their songs of praise to him in the eternal world!

#517

BESETTING SINS

**[Psalm 18:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.23)**

"I have been blameless before him and I kept myself from my iniquity."

Nothing is a richer source of comfort to any man than the testimony of his own conscience that he has acted right; for, if our own heart does not condemn us—then have we confidence towards God.

Paul enjoyed this in a pre-eminent degree, "Our rejoicing," says he, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conduct in the world, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12)."

Just so, in the whole of his conduct towards Saul, David could appeal to God himself, that he had demeaned himself as a loyal subject, and had rendered nothing but good for all the evil that he had received at his hands.

"They (Saul and his followers) confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me. The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and I kept myself from my iniquity." [Psalm 18:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.18-23)

It is my intention to inquire,

I. What is that iniquity which we may properly call our own?

There are the seeds of all sin, in every individual of our fallen race! But, as in different soils some plants will flourish more than others, so in different men are different sinful propensities, which, growing to maturity, become prominent and characteristic features of the different individuals. There is, more or less, in every one, some "sin which more easily besets him, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1);" and which, therefore, may be justly called his own sin, as having taken the fuller possession of his soul, and as serving to distinguish him from others.

1. That may be called our besetting sin, to which, from outward circumstances, **we are most exposed**.

This I suppose to be the precise case with David in my text. He was persecuted by Saul with most unrelenting cruelty; and was strongly tempted, both by his friends and by a regard for his own safety, to avail himself of the opportunities which were afforded him of destroying his enemy, [1 Samuel 24:2-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.2-15); [1 Samuel 26:6-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.6-12).

Now, by birth and education, men are exposed to widely different temptations; as Agur intimated, when he prayed, "Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." [Proverbs 30:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.7-9)."

Men also are subjected to evils incidental to their different vocations in life. Those who move in a higher sphere, under the influence of proud and ambitious thoughts, are led to seek their own advancement at the expense of others. Those of the middle classes, who are engaged in mercantile transactions, are but too prone to indulge an inordinate desire for wealth; while those of the lowest rank are apt to yield to the unhallowed emotions of murmuring and discontent.

When John the Baptist saw people of different vocations coming to his baptism, he particularly adverted to their respective occupations, to guard them against the evils incident to each; warning the publicans against exaction, and the soldiers against rapacity, [Luke 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.12-14); and thus showing how all, in every department of life, are bound to watch against the sins to which their peculiar callings more immediately expose them!

From our friends and relations in life we also are subjected to many evils which tend to form and fix our character.

Are we surrounded by those who are mirthful and dissipated? Then we are apt to contract a taste for gaiety and folly.

Are our nearest relations worldly, carnal, covetous, ambitious? Then we are apt to drink into their spirit, and to be greatly influenced by their example; as it is said of Joram, king of Judah, "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord! [2 Kings 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 8.18)."

2. That may be called our besetting sin, to which, from inward dispositions, **we are most inclined**.

Even in the earliest infancy, there will be found widely different *dispositions* in children of the same parents; and as the children grow up to manhood, these form, in a very great degree, their distinctive characters through life. Doubtless these dispositions may be abated in some, and strengthened in others, according to the occasions that may arise for their nourishment or suppression. They may also vary with the different periods of their life.

But, whatever is a man's leading disposition, it will expose him to temptation, and he will be likely to be betrayed into sin by means of those things which are calculated to gratify his peculiar desires. In other matters he may maintain a blameless deportment; or, if he has erred, may easily renounce his errors; but on the side of his darling lust he will be in danger of falling; even as Herod, who would obey in many respects the admonitions of John the Baptist, [Mark 6:18-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.18-28), but, when called to put away his beloved Herodias, would rather sacrifice the life of John, than comply with his advice! Let the besetting propensity be what it may—on that side will be our danger, and the sin arising from it is that which we need to guard against as most peculiarly our own.

3. That may be called our besetting sin, to which, from the force of **habit**, we are most addicted.

Habit is, indeed, a second nature! An Ethiopian may as easily change his skin, or a leopard his spots—as we can put away an evil to which we have been long accustomed.

A man that has long yielded to fretfulness and impatience will never lack occasions whereon to show the irritability of his mind.

A person who has given way to impurity, will contract such a propensity to the indulgence of it, that his very "eyes will be full of adultery, and he cannot cease from sin, [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14)." Even when there are not before him any objects to call it forth; his own polluted imagination furnishes him with plenty of fuel for his unhallowed fire.

"The backslider in heart," we are told, "shall be filled with his own ways, [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.14);" from whence we see that habit gives to our lusts a certain propensity over us, and to us a certain desire for them; insomuch, that as there is a mutual indwelling between God and the believing soul—so is there also between a sinner and the lusts with which, from habit, he has obtained a more than ordinary familiarity. So true is that declaration of the Apostle, that, whatever be a man's outward temptations, he is, in fact, "drawn away by his own lust, and enticed! [James 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.14)."

If, from what has been said, we have any insight into our besetting sin, let us proceed to inquire,

II. How far we are able to adopt the language of the Psalmist in relation to it?

Certainly, we are all deeply interested in this matter. Let me, then, press home upon you the following inquiries:

1. How far have you **discovered** your besetting sin?

It is astonishing to what an extent men in general are blinded in reference to it. All around them see it easily enough, while they themselves are strangers to it! All their acquaintances will say:  
This is a proud man;  
that is a passionate man;  
that is a covetous man;  
that is a mean-spirited and censorious man;  
that is an argumentative and discontented man.

But, however clear men's characteristic infirmities are to others, they are hidden from themselves!

In many cases men not only veil their faults under some subtle name, but actually take credit to themselves for those very peculiarities as constituting their most distinguishing virtues!

The proud man, who for a slight offence will shed the blood of an acquaintance, calls himself a man of honor.

The ambitious man, who slaughters thousands and tens of thousands in order to extend his empire, when he has already far more than he knows well how to govern, is called a conqueror, and values himself upon that as entitling him to the admiration of mankind.

The man who is, with insatiable avidity, amassing wealth, applauds himself as prudently providing for his family.

And if a man's faults be too glaring to be turned into virtues, he will extenuate them under the name of trivial errors, or youthful indiscretions.

But, Beloved, if this is your state—then you are yet in darkness and the shadow of death. The very first step towards the knowledge of the Savior is the knowledge of yourselves; and if you do not possess not this—then all your other knowledge, whatever it may be, will be in vain!

2. How far have you **watched and prayed** against your besetting sin?

With all our self-love, our besetting sin may be so glaring and dominant that we cannot but know it. Still, however, we may not be humbled under a sense of it, but like King Saul, may be returning to it again and again, after all our acknowledgment of its vileness.

But it is not thus with an upright soul. He will say with indignation, "What have I any more to do with idols?" And if he has been foiled in many attempts to subdue his lusts, he will be more and more earnest in prayer to God for grace sufficient for him, that, "through the influences of the Holy Spirit, he may mortify the deeds of the body, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13)," and "preserve himself unspotted," though in the midst of a polluting and ensnaring world! [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27).

See, also, whether you watch against the occasions that may call forth your indwelling corruption; and whether you mark the first risings of it in your soul—that you may the more effectually prevent its dominance and defilement? Our Lord's direction is, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation;" and he has provided armor for us, that we may fight against sin in its first assaults. We may be sure, that, if we are not thus habitually contending with our besetting sin—then we can never with truth assert that we have kept ourselves from it.

3. How far have we **actually overcome** our besetting sin?

"One that is born of God cannot practice sin, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9)," as once he did. God has said, that "sin shall not have dominion over him, because he is not under the law, but under grace, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14)." "The man that obeys sin, is the slave of sin;" and consequently neither is, nor can be, the servant of God, [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16). He may, it is true, still feel the workings of his besetting sin; but then it will be an intolerable burden to him; and while under a sense of its working, he will cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" he will be enabled to add, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, [Romans 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18-19); [Romans 7:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24-25)."

Sin's motions may still continue; but its power is broken, and its reign destroyed; so that he is no longer the bond-slave of Satan; for "the truth has made him free; and he is free indeed, [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32)."

That I may enforce this subject on your hearts and consciences, I declare before God and this assembly:

1. That only in proportion as you keep yourselves from your besetting sin, have you any evidence that you are upright before God.

David speaks of his victory over his besetting sin as his evidence of his uprightness before God, "I have been upright before God; for I have kept myself from my iniquity."

Now, I beseech you, brethren, to try yourselves by this test. "If you are Christ's indeed—then you have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24);" and if you are "Israelites indeed—then you are without any known and allowed deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)." But I must warn you that, if you allow any one sin—then you cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ; for if you were really his, you would "walk as he walked, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6)," and "purify yourselves even as he is pure! [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

2. Only in proportion as you keep yourselves from your besetting sin, have you any hope of happiness in the eternal world.

Our blessed Lord has told us plainly, that "a right eye or a right hand retained by us will be the means of casting us into Hell-fire! [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48)." What a dreadful thought is this! How fearful should it make us of self-deception! Truly, we should not be content with searching and trying ourselves, but should beg of God also, to "search and try us, to see if there is any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)." For, if we should be saved at last, "we must be sincere, and without offence until the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.10)."

#518

EQUITY OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE

**[Psalm 18:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.25-26)**

"To the faithful you show yourself faithful,  
 to the blameless you show yourself blameless,  
 to the pure you show yourself pure, but  
 to the wicked you show yourself hostile."

In the present dispensations of Providence, we may behold a far greater measure of equality than is generally imagined; for not only is the happiness of men less dependent upon outward circumstances than we are apt to suppose, but there is more of just retribution manifested in reference to the conduct of mankind. The ungodly are, for the most part, left to involve themselves in many calamities; while the godly are generally preserved in peace and quietness. There is sufficient of equality in God's dispensations to mark his superintending care; but sufficient inequality to convince us, that there shall be a day of future retribution, when the whole of the divine government shall be justified in the sight of the assembled universe!

The passage before us may be considered as relating to both periods. The Psalmist is returning thanks to God, for having interposed in his behalf to vindicate his integrity against the accusations of his enemies, "The Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight, [Psalm 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.24)." He then goes on to speak of the general system of the divine government, as begun on earth, and as completed in the eternal world,

"To the faithful you show yourself faithful,  
 to the blameless you show yourself blameless,  
 to the pure you show yourself pure, but  
 to the wicked you show yourself hostile."

From these words, I shall take occasion to show:

I. The equity of the divine procedure, **in the punishment of the ungodly**.

The day of judgment is called " the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God; because God will then render unto every man according to his deeds, [Romans 2:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5-6)." Whatever has been the conduct of men—the divine conduct towards them shall be in exact accordance with it.

Consider, now:

1. What has been your conduct towards **God**.

You have felt no esteem for him in your hearts.

You have preferred every vanity, and even the basest lust, before him.

You have not willingly entertained the thought of him in your minds.

You have, in effect, "said to him, Depart from me! I desire not the knowledge of your ways."

About his favor you have felt but little concern; nor has it been a matter of any importance in your eyes, whether he was pleased or displeased, honored or dishonored.

In vain has God called, invited, entreated, expostulated with you. You have had no disposition to attend to his voice, no heart to comply with his will; and when he has threatened you with his everlasting displeasure, you have despised him, and determined to go on in your own ways, whatever might be the consequence.

What now will be the result of this in the last day? God will deal with you as you have dealt with him.

"You would not have anything to do with me; I therefore will have nothing to do with you.

You put me far from you; now I put you far from me.

You preferred everything before my favor; expect, therefore, no favor at my hands.

It was anguish to you to come into my presence; you shall never be troubled with my presence more.

You chose sin, with all its consequences, rather than me and my kingdom.

Take now, and take forever, the portion you have chosen—eternal damnation!"

2. What has been your conduct towards **the Lord Jesus Christ**.

The Savior has died to effect a reconciliation between God and sinful men; and has offered to cleanse you in his own blood, and to clothe you in the spotless robe of his righteousness, that you may stand before God without spot or blemish.

But you would not come to him for his benefits; you have rejected ever offer he has made to you—they have been too humiliating for your proud hearts. You have disdained to acknowledge your need of him—you have preferred being a savior to yourselves; and have chosen rather to stand or fall by your own righteousness, than to submit to the righteousness provided for you by him.

In vain has he warned you against the danger of unbelief—you would not see any danger attending it. If you have made any use of Christ at all, it has been rather to encourage a hope of salvation in a sinful and unconverted state, than to obtain from him the grace of which you have stood in need.

And what will be the return made to you?

"You have rejected my Son," God will say, "you shall therefore have no part in him.

You would not submit to be washed by him from your sins—your sins, therefore, shall cleave unto you.

You would not seek deliverance from condemnation through him—under condemnation, therefore, shall you lie.

You would not take him as a Savior in anyone respect—therefore he shall be no Savior to you.

You made no use of him, but to warrant and justify your continuance in sin—therefore you shall be left forever in your sins, and have no part with him to all eternity.

The whole tenor of your life has been to this effect: 'We will not have this Man to reign over us!' and therefore from him and his kingdom you shall be separated forever!"

3. What has been your conduct towards **your own souls**.

You have not cared about them, or sought their happiness. You have been mindful only of earthly things. Your ease, pleasure, interest, honor, the approbation of men—have been more to you than any concern pertaining to the soul. Pardon, peace with God, holiness, glory—have all been, in your esteem, of small account, in comparison with some temporal advantage. When warned what must be the outcome of such a life—you have determined to run the risk, and to endure the consequences of impenitence, rather than put yourselves to the pain and trouble of repenting.

Heaven has had no value to you, in comparison with some vain lust or indulgence.

Hell has had no terror to you, in comparison with the pain of self-denial, and the shame of ridicule from the ungodly world.

According, therefore, as you have sowed—so you shall reap, "You have sown to the flesh, and of the flesh you shall reap corruption!" God will say to you:  
"Your soul shall be of as little value in my eyes—as it was in yours!  
Heaven was not worth your seeking—so you shall not have it.  
Hell was not worth your avoiding—so you shall take your portion in it.  
You were satisfied with temporal trifles—so you shall have nothing beyond them.  
You did not even desire eternal happiness—so you shall never have it obtruded upon you, but shall be left destitute of it forever and ever.  
You chose to oppose me, and walk contrary to me—so continue now your fruitless contest to all eternity, while I eternally oppose you.  
You have been the authors of your own destiny—so by your own choice, you must abide forever and ever!"

The same mode of proceeding is observed by God,

II. The equity of the divine procedure, **in the rewarding of the godly**.

1. Mark how God will act towards **the penitent**.

It is a grief to you that you have ever sinned against so good a God. You are ashamed. You blush and are confounded when you look back upon your ways. You even loath and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes. And if you could, by any means, undo what you have done amiss—then you would do anything, or suffer anything, that it were possible for you to do or suffer, to effect it.

How, then, will God deal with you?

Do you repent of the evil you have done against me?

He will say; Then "I will repent of all the evil which I threatened to the unrepentant, [Exodus 32:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.9-14). [Jeremiah 18:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.7-8); [Jeremiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.13)."

Are you saying, How shall I appear before my God?

He will say, "I will not execute the fierceness of my anger upon you."

Does he behold you smiting your heart, with indignation against yourself, as a vile rebellious wretch?

He will construe it as an evidence of your relation to him, and will appeal in your behalf to the whole universe, "Is he not a dear son? Is he not a pleasant child? For since I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore my affections are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, says the Lord, [Jeremiah 31:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.19-20)."

The moment he sees you bewailing bitterly the existence of your sins, he "blots them out of the book of his remembrance," and "casts them irrecoverably into the depths of the sea!"

2. Mark how God will act towards **the believing**.

You are looking to the Lord Jesus Christ, as "set forth by God himself to be the atoning sacrifice for your sins;" and are desiring nothing under Heaven so much as a saving interest in him.

What, then, will God say to you? "You shall not be disappointed of your hope.

Do you renounce all dependence on yourself? I will not exact of you anything as a justifying righteousness.

Do you look to what my dear Son has done and suffered for you, and plead it as the ground of your hope before me? It shall be imputed to you, and be accepted in your behalf.

You wash in the fountain opened for sin—so it shall cleanse you so perfectly, that you shall stand before me without spot or blemish.

You trust in my word—so you shall find me a God of truth.

You lay hold on my promises—so not one of them shall ever fail you.

You are willing to be saved in the way of my appointment—so according to your faith it shall be unto you.

You are hoping for a crown of righteousness and glory, as the purchase of my Son's blood—so you shall possess all that he himself possesses, and be "a joint heir with him" of crowns and kingdoms that shall never fail.

You have lived upon him—so you shall live with him forever and ever.'

3. Mark how God will act towards **the obedient**.

You have given up yourselves to God in a way of holy obedience; and have encountered much, in order to approve your fidelity to him. To you, then, God will say,

"You have been faithful over a few things—so be rulers over many things.

You acknowledged me as your Master—so I acknowledge you as my servants.

You regarded me as your Father—so I will regard you as my children.

To please me was your one aim; and you dared to honor me above all—so I will now bless you, and honor you in the sight of the whole assembled universe.

You regarded nothing but my favor—so you shall have it, and all the tokens of it you can possibly desire.

By patient continuance in well-doing, you sought for glory and honor and immortality—so you shall possess them all, even everlasting life!"

ADDRESS.

Now choose what portion you will have. I venture to assure you, that it shall be unto you according to your desire, provided only that desire operates practically on your heart and life. I know, indeed, that salvation is altogether of grace. But I know, also, that you can never perish, but by your own consent, and purpose, and will. I mean not to say that anyone would choose misery for itself, or in preference to happiness; but if you choose the service of Satan, with all its consequences, in preference to the service of God and its attendant benefits—then are you the authors of your own destruction, as much as you are of the conduct leading to it.

God has said respecting the wicked, "Destruction and misery are in their ways;" and to when can you ascribe your arrival at their end, when you are willingly and deliberately walking in their ways? If you will persuade yourselves that "the broad road, which leads to destruction, will bring you to happiness as much as the narrow way that leads unto life"—then you can blame none but yourselves for the disappointment which you will experience.

Prepare then for yourselves such an outcome to this present state of things, as you will before long wish that you had secured. Hear God's own direction to you, "Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. But woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given to him! [Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10-11)."

To the same effect our blessed Lord speaks in his sermon on the mount, declaring that the merciful, the pure, the upright, shall have a portion accorded to them suited to their respective characters, [Luke 6:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.37-38). Remember, that if you do not obtain eternal life—then the fault was only in yourselves, who, when urged and entreated by God, refused to walk in the way that would have led you to it!

#519

THANKSGIVING FOR ANY GREAT DELIVERANCE

**[Psalm 18:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.50)**

"He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever."

The Psalm before us is also recorded in the Second Book of Samuel, Chapter 22. There it stands, as it was drawn up at first by David for his own immediate use; but here it is inserted, with some slight alterations and improvements, for the use of the Church in all ages. The title informs us on what occasion it was written, namely, on David's deliverance from the hand of all his enemies, and especially from the hand of Saul. But, as in most of his Psalms, so in this, David speaks, not in his own person only, but in the person of the Messiah, whose type he was.

It is a composition of very peculiar beauty; the figures are extremely bold, and the poetry is sublime. Of course the expressions are not to be so literally taken, as if they were an unadorned relation of facts; some of them are altogether figurative; and were verified, not at all in the letter, but only in the spiritual sense; some are more applicable to David himself, and others to Christ; but altogether it is a poem highly wrought, and exquisitely finished. It is our intention to set before you,

I. The diversified import of this Psalm.

The Psalm admits of a threefold interpretation:

1. A **historical** interpretation, as it relates to David.

David from his youth experienced many troubles. From the moment that Saul's envy and jealousy were awakened by the fame of David's exploits, this youth became the object of his incessant persecution; insomuch, that he was forced to flee for his life, and for several years was kept in constant fear of falling a sacrifice to the rage of Saul, "The sorrows of death and Hell compassed him," as it were, continually, verse 4, 5.

But his deliverances were great and manifold. Repeatedly did he, almost by miracle, escape the stroke of the javelin that was cast at him; and frequently did God in a visible manner interpose to keep him from falling into the hands of Saul. Once he was in the midst of Saul's army, and in the very same cave with Saul; and yet was preserved by God, so that neither Saul nor any of his soldiers could find it in their hearts to touch him. "David in his distress called upon the Lord; and God heard him out of his holy temple," and delivered him, verse 6.

These deliverances he acknowledges with devoutest gratitude. Here the Psalmist, borne as it were on eagle's wings, soars into the highest region of poetic imagery; he calls to mind the wonders which God had wrought for Israel of old, and represents them as renewed in his own experience. The glorious manifestations of Jehovah on Mount Sinai were not more bright in his eyes, verse 7-14, nor the passage of Israel through the Red Sea more wonderful, verse 15, than were the displays of almighty power and love which he had seen in his behalf, verse 16-19. In these deliverances David further acknowledges the equity of God in having so vindicated his character from the undeserved calumnies by which his enemies had sought to justify their cruelty towards him, verse 21-27.

From the experiences of past mercies, he expresses his confidence in God under whatever trials might yet await him. It is delightful to see how careful he is to ascribe all the glory of his preservation to that God who had delivered him, verse 28-42; and the full persuasion that his victory would in due time be complete, verse 43-45. Then with profoundest gratitude he blesses and adores his heavenly Benefactor for all the mercies he has received; recapitulating as it were, and giving us the substance of the whole, in the words of our text, verse 46-50.

Were we to view the Psalm only as a historical record, it would be very instructive; but it has a far higher sense as:

2. A **prophetic** interpretation, as it relates to Christ.

That it is a prophecy respecting Christ and his Gospel, we are assured by one whose testimony is decisive on the point. Paul, maintaining that Christ, though himself "a minister of the circumcision," was to have his Gospel preached to the Gentiles, and to establish his kingdom over the heathen world, expressly quotes the words immediately preceding our text, as prophetic of that event, [Romans 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.9). Here therefore we see it proved, that David spoke as a type of Christ; and a clue is given us for a fuller understanding of the whole Psalm.

Behold then in this Psalm our adorable Redeemer; behold his conflicts! He was indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" "nor was any sorrow like unto his sorrow;" "his visage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men." How justly it might be said of him, that "the sorrows of Hell encompassed him." We learn from his history, "Now," says he, "is my soul sorrowful even unto death." In the garden he was in such an agony, that he sweat great drops of blood from every pore. And on the cross he uttered the heart-rending cry, My God, my God! why have you forsaken me?" In that hour all the powers of darkness were let loose upon him; and God himself also, even the Father, combined to "bruise him," until he fell a victim to the broken law, a sacrifice, "a curse! [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)."

But speedily we behold his deliverances. Like David, "he cried to the Lord in his distress;" "he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears; and was heard, in that he feared, verse 6 with [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7)." In him the elevated language of the Psalmist obtained a more literal accomplishment; for at his resurrection "the earth quaked, the rocks rent;" and together with him, as monuments and witnesses of his triumph, "many of the dead came forth from their graves, and went into the city, and appeared unto many. O, what a deliverance was here! "The cords of death were loosed" (it was not possible that he should any longer be held by them); and he rose triumphant from the grave; yes, he ascended, too, to Heaven, and was there seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, all the angels and principalities and powers of Heaven, earth, and Hell, being made subject unto him. In comparison with this display of the Divine glory, the images referred to in this Psalm were faint, even as a candle before the sun.

Then commenced his victories. Then was literally fulfilled that prediction of the Psalmist, "a people whom I have not known shall serve me; as soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me, verses 43, 44." No less than three thousand of his murderers were converted in the very first sermon; and soon his kingdom was established throughout the whole Roman Empire. This prediction is yet daily receiving a more enlarged accomplishment; thousands in every quarter of the globe are submitting themselves to him; and in due season, all the kingdoms of the world will acknowledge him as their universal Lord.

The triumphs of David over the neighboring nations, though signal, were nothing in comparison with those which Christ is gaining over the face of the whole earth; and he will "go on conquering and to conquer," "until all his enemies are put under his feet." O blessed and glorious day! May "the Lord hasten it in his time!"

But like many other passages of Scripture, the Psalm admits also of an interpretation, which is,

3. A **spiritual** interpretation, as it relates to the people of God in all ages.

The circumstance of its having been altered, and set apart for the use of the Church, shows, that, in substance, it exhibits the dealings of God with his people in all ages. They, like David, and like their blessed Lord and Master, have their trials, their deliverances, their triumphs; in all of which God is greatly glorified, and for which he ought ever to be adored.

Who among us that has ever been oppressed with a sense of guilt, and with a fear of God's wrath;

who that has felt the tranquillizing influence of the Redeemer's blood sprinkled on his conscience, and speaking peace to his soul;

who that has been enabled to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to serve his God in newness of heart and life;

who, I say, that has experienced these things, does not find that the language of this Psalm, figuratively indeed, but justly, depicts the gracious dealings of God towards him? Methinks, the sentiment that is uppermost in the mind of every such person is, "Who is God, besides the Lord? or who is a rock, except our God verse 31."

But this part of our subject will receive fuller illustration while we notice the Psalm in reference to:

II. The **practical use** we should make of it.

The practical use of Scripture is that to which we should more particularly apply ourselves; and especially should we keep this in view in reading the Psalms, which, beyond any other part of the sacred volume, are calculated to elevate our souls to Heaven, and to fill us with delight in God. From this Psalm in particular we should learn:

1. To glorify God for the mercies he has given unto us.

We should never forget what we were, while dead in trespasses and sins, and what we are made by the effectual working of God's grace in our souls. The change is nothing less than "passing from death unto life," and "from the power of Satan unto God;" and when we contemplate it, we should be filled with wonder and with love on account of the stupendous mercies we have received. We should ever remember, "Who it is that has made us to differ" from those who are yet in darkness and the shadow of death; and the constant frame of our souls should be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise!"

We may, indeed, without impropriety on some occasions say, as the Psalmist, "I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them; I have wounded them, that they were not able to rise;" but we must soon check ourselves, like Paul, and say, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me;" "He who has wrought me to the self-same thing, is God." It is worthy of particular observation, how anxious David is to give to God all the glory of those exploits which he commemorates, "By You I have run through a troop; and by my God I have leaped over a wall, verse 29. See also verse 32-36, 47-49." Let us imitate him in this respect, and "give unto our God the glory due unto his name;" yes, "let our mouths be filled with his praise all the day long."

2. To confide in God under all future difficulties.

In what exalted terms David speaks of God at the commencement of this Psalm, verse 2. Truly, he had profited well from his past experience. And ought not we to profit in like manner? Ought not we to remember what God is to all his believing people? If we have God for our God, what have we to fear? Can any enemy prevail against us, when he is on our side? Remember how God reproved those of old, who, when danger threatened them, gave way to terror, instead of trusting confidently in their God, "Say not, A confederacy, a confederacy! etc., but sanctify the Lord Almighty himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread; and he shall be to you for a sanctuary, [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14)." Whatever be your need, know that He is able to supply it; whatever be your difficulty, He can make you triumphant over it, "His way is perfect; his Word is tried; he is a shield to all who trust in him, verse 30."

3. To conduct ourselves so that we may reasonably expect his blessing.

Though God is found of those who sought him not, and dispenses his blessings altogether sovereignly and according to his own good pleasure towards the ungodly world—he proceeds, for the most part, in a way of equity towards his own peculiar people. The declaration that was made to king Asa is found true in every age, "The Lord is with you, while you are with him; and if you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you, [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2)." Precisely to the same effect are those expressions of the Psalmist, "With the upright, the merciful, the pure, you will show yourself upright, and merciful, and pure; but with the froward you will show yourself froward," or, as it is in the margin, "you will wrestle." "You will save the afflicted people (the humble); but you will bring down proud looks verse 25-27." If we walk uprightly and circumspectly before him, and in a humble dependence on his grace, there is not anything which he will not do for us; but, "if we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us. Inquire, then, whether you are really "keeping the ways of the Lord," and are "keeping yourselves from your iniquity," that is, from the peculiar sin to which, by constitution, by habit, or by your situation in life—you are most inclined, verse 21-23. I charge you, before God, that you all make this a matter of serious inquiry. The "besetting sin," ah! it is that which separates between God and our souls; it is that which "keeps good things from us." How many are there, who, while they make a profession of religion, are yet, by their unmortified lusts, or worldly desires, or slothful habits, or by some habitual evil—provoking God to depart from them!

Beware lest it be so with you; and "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." You may grieve him, until you altogether "quench" his sacred motions. We entreat you to be upon your guard against this so fatal an evil. "Keep your hearts with all diligence, "yes, "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." Then shall God delight himself in you, and be not only your present portion, "but your everlasting great reward!"

#520

EXCELLENCY OF GOD'S WORD

**[Psalm 19:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7-10)**

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.  
 The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.  
 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.  
 The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.  
 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever.  
 The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
 More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb!"  [Psalm 19:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7-10)

God has not left himself without witness even among the most unenlightened heathens. His works testify of him; the heavens and the earth declare his eternal power and godhead. They speak silently indeed, but intelligibly, to every man; so that idolaters of every name are absolutely without excuse, verse 3, [Romans 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.19-20).

Wherever the light and warming influence of the sun extend, there is God proclaimed as an infinitely wise and gracious Being. But we have a richer source of instruction opened to us; we have a revelation, which, while it proclaims the existence and attributes of Jehovah, makes known to us his will, and points out the path in which we may approach him with a certainty of acceptance; and so extensively was that published by our Lord and his Apostles, that it might be said, even in that age, "Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world! Compare verse 4 with [Romans 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.18)." It is of this written word that David speaks in the Psalm before us; in which are set forth:

I. The **parts** and **properties** of God's Word.

The various terms here used to designate the Word of God, may be considered as directing our attention to all the different parts of that word; each of which has, annexed to it, an appropriate epithet of commendation.

"The law of the Lord" is in the marginal translation called, "The doctrine of the Lord;" and it may be understood as including under one general term all that is afterwards more particularly specified; and it is so "perfect," that nothing can be taken from it, or added to it, but at the peril of our souls! [Revelation 22:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.18-19).

"The testimony of the Lord" is "the Gospel of the grace of God, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24)," even "the witness which God has testified of his Son, [1 John 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.9)." It is "the record that God has given of his Son, namely, that in him is eternal life; and that he who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life! [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12)."

Now this is "sure," so sure, that it may be relied upon with the most implicit confidence, "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners! [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)."

"The statutes of the Lord" are those ordinances, which God appointed under the ceremonial law to shadow forth all the glorious mysteries of the Gospel, and which were right for the time then present; though, since the introduction of the clearer light of the Gospel, they are abrogated as burdensome and unnecessary. Not but that there are some still in force, such as the Sabbath, and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And these may well be called "right;" for who can doubt the propriety of a certain portion of our time being dedicated to the especial service of Him to whom we owe our very existence? Or who can question the suitableness of those easy and instructive rites, whereby we are dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ at first, and afterwards commemorate from time to time the wonders of his dying love?

"The commandment of the Lord" is the moral law, in which we are taught, in what way we are to serve and please our God. And this is "pure," and "holy, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12);" it is given to regulate, not our words and actions only, but the inmost thoughts and desires of our hearts. It is indeed "exceedingly broad, [Psalm 119:96](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.96)," extending to every motive and principle of the mind, yes, to every inclination, affection, appetite of the soul, and requiring the whole to be in a state of constant and entire conformity to the will of God.

"The fear of the Lord" we consider as another name for the Holy Scriptures, only putting, as is frequently done, the effect for the cause. The author would be understood to speak this with diffidence, because he is not aware that any commentator has put this construction on the words; but he considers any other interpretation as unsuitable to the context. Something similar occurs in [Genesis 31:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 31.42), where God is called, "The fear of Isaac;" where not the act, but the object, of Isaac's fear is spoken of.

If this sense is not approved, the reader may understand the words as signifying, The worship of God. The Word of God, as inculcating and exciting the fear of the Lord, is "clean;" its one object is, to cleanse and purify the souls of men. Hence our Lord says, "Now you are clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you, [John 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.3). Compare also [Ephesians 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.26)."

Moreover, the Word, in this view of it, "endures forever," since its operation is uniform to the end of the world; and the purifying effects produced by it, will continue through all eternity.

"The judgments of the Lord" are his warnings and threatenings; which though questioned by men as false, or condemned by them as unjust, are yet "true and righteous altogether."

We are very incompetent judges of the demerit of sin, or of the conduct which God, as the moral Governor of the universe, has thought proper to pursue; but we are assured, that when he shall inflict on the impenitent the judgments he has denounced against them, all his intelligent creatures will exclaim, "True and righteous are your judgments, O Lord God Almighty!" "just and true are your ways, O King of Saints!"

As the different terms which we have considered are not so definite in their import but that they admit of different interpretations, we shall wave the further consideration of them; and, comprehending them all under one general term, "The Word of God," we shall proceed to notice,

II. The **use** and **excellence** of God's Word.

It would occupy too much time to enter fully into this subject; let it suffice to notice those particular uses which are mentioned in our text.

1. The Word of God is of use **to illuminate the mind**.

Previous to the application of the Word to the heart by the Holy Spirit, we are in utter darkness; but "the entrance of God's Word gives light." Truly it is a "marvelous light that we are brought into," when our eyes are opened to discern "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!" Nor is it the educated only, who receive instruction from it; it is intended more especially for the poor. There is something in the Gospel which tends rather to offend the proud, but is most palatable and delightful to the humble.

Hence we are told, "It makes wise the simple." What astonishing views of God, of Christ, of the human heart, of the evil of sin, of the beauty of holiness, of the felicity of Heaven—have many unlettered people attained! Yet it is in the knowledge of these things that true wisdom consists; and this knowledge is imparted to all who embrace the Gospel, in proportion to the simplicity of their minds, and the devotedness of their hearts to God. These are "the things," which, as our blessed Lord informs us, "are hidden from the wise and prudent, and are revealed unto babes."

Without such a special illumination of the mind, the most learned philosopher cannot comprehend them, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14); and by such an illumination the most untutored savage shall be "made wise unto salvation."

2. The Word of God is of use **to convert the soul**.

Truly, "the Word is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword!" It is "the rod of God's strength," even that wonder-working rod, which subdues all his enemies before him. "Like fire it melts; and like a hammer, it breaks the rock in pieces."

See its effects upon the three thousand on the day of Pentecost! Such is its operation, wherever "it comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." It humbles the proudest spirit, and subdues the most obdurate heart to the obedience of faith. Nor is it to the adoption of new principles only, that it brings the soul, but to the acquisition of new habits; so that it becomes set on Christ and heavenly things, as once it was set on self and earthly things; it assimilates the soul to Christ as the great exemplar, and "changes it into the divine image, from one degree of glory to another, by the Spirit of our God."

3. The Word of God is of use **to rejoice the heart**.

Ignorant men imagine that the application of God's Word to the soul is productive only of pain and sorrow; but those who have ever "tasted of the good Word of life" have found, by happy experience, that it fills them "with joy and peace in believing," yes, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory!" The Word is to them the charter of all their privileges, and the map of their everlasting inheritance!

As an heir peruses with delight a will in which great wealth is unexpectedly bequeathed to him, so the Christian finding in every page of the sacred volume his title to all the blessedness and glory of Heaven—how can he but rejoice in such records? how can he but concur with David in saying, "They are more desired by me than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb?

We may learn from hence:

1. Our exalted privilege.

If it was the highest privilege of the Jews, that "to them were committed the oracles of God," much more are we distinguished, who have the writings of the New Testament added to those of the Old. Let us learn to estimate this privilege aright. Let us remember, that in this blessed volume is contained all that can be needful either for the instruction of our minds, or the salvation of our souls! And while we enjoy this inestimable blessing ourselves, let us labor by all possible means to communicate it to others.

2. Our obvious duty.

We should "search the Scriptures daily," "digging into them as for hidden treasures," and praying earnestly to God, that he would "open our minds to understand them." We should look to them as the ground of all our hopes, and the rule of all our conduct. To study the book of nature will be well; but to study the sacred volume with prayer will tend to our highest perfection, and will "thoroughly furnish us unto every good word and work!"

#521

THE USE AND BENEFIT OF THE SCRIPTURES

**[Psalm 19:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.10-11)**

"They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

God has at no time left himself without witness in the world, seeing that he has spoken to all, in and by the visible creation, from which the most unenlightened heathen might learn his eternal power and godhead.

But to us he has communicated a perfect revelation of his mind and will, which, as the Psalmist informs us in the preceding verses, is capable of producing the most beneficial effects. It was but a small portion of the Scriptures which David possessed; yet his testimony respecting them shows that they were inestimable in his eyes, and that to all who received them aright, they would be a source of the richest blessings. In discoursing on his words we shall point out,

I. The **excellency** of the Scriptures.

Gold and honey are both excellent in their kind, and may fitly represent those things which are most pleasing to a carnal and a sensual appetite; but the Scriptures are infinitely preferable to both!

1. The Scriptures are "more desirable than GOLD".

Gold, though so ardently and universally desired, is yet very confined in its uses. It is useful only to the body; yet not to that in all circumstances, nor for any long duration.

But the Scriptures are profitable to the soul, and that too in every possible condition; nor will there be any termination to the benefits they convey. What light do they bring into the mind! the weakest Christian upon earth that is instructed out of them, as far surpasses all the philosophers of Greece and Rome, as they surpassed the most ignorant of the human race.

How powerful too is their operation on the soul! The suggestions of man's wisdom were utterly incapable of counteracting the wicked propensities of the heart; but these, when applied with power from on high, subdue the soul to God, and renovate it after the divine image. Can gold then, however "great" in quantity, or "fine" in quality, be compared with these?

2. The Scriptures are "sweeter also than HONEY".

The most delicious honey is not nearly so pleasing to the palate, as the Scriptures are to the spiritual taste.

The doctrines of the Gospel, especially that which is the fundamental article of our faith—salvation through the blood of our incarnate God—how inexpressibly sweet are they to a weary and heavy-laden soul!

What a delightful feast do the promises, "the exceeding great and precious promises," afford to those who live upon them!

The precepts too are equally high in the Christian's estimation; their purity exactly suits his appetite, and instead of disgusting him, renders them tenfold more pleasing to his soul, [Psalm 119:140](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.140).

Nor is he averse to the threatenings themselves; while he regards them as holy and just, he considers them also as good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12).

In short, the Christian feasts upon the blessed book of God. He finds it the joy and rejoicing of his heart! [Jeremiah 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.16). He esteems it more than his necessary food! [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12).

But we will proceed to mark more distinctly,

II. The **use** of the Scriptures

A variety of uses are mentioned in the preceding context; but the text comprehends them all under two particulars:

1. The Scriptures WARN us against much evil.

We could have had no conception of the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart, if God had not revealed it to us. But from the insight into it which the Scriptures afford us, we learn that to trust in one's own heart is the most consummate folly, [Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26), since it is sure to mislead us, and to betray us into some evil.

From the same fountain of knowledge also we learn that there is an invisible, but mighty, agent:  
whose malice is most inveterate,  
whose devices are most subtle, and  
whose labors to destroy us are incessant.

Against his wiles we are put upon our guard; we are taught how to distinguish his agency, and to defeat his plots.

There is yet another danger, of which we could have formed no idea, if God had not instructed us respecting it. We are told of another invisible power, even the Holy Spirit himself, who strives with us, and endeavors to establish the kingdom of God in our hearts. But we may "grieve," and "vex" that divine Agent, and may so "resist" him as to "quench" his sacred motions. Against this therefore, as the greatest of all evils—we are frequently and strongly warned.

It is no small advantage to us that every duty, and every danger, is set before us in living characters. We are enabled in the Scriptures to discern the track of the godly, and to see where all who have suffered shipwreck, have perished; so that, notwithstanding we are passing through an ocean filled with hidden rocks and shoals—yet, if we only attend to the buoys which God has placed in our sight, we cannot but navigate it in perfect safety, and reach in due season our destined port.

2. The Scriptures lead us to much good.

We do not speak of the recompense, which those who love the Scriptures will meet with in another world. There is a reward in keeping the commandments, as well as for it; and it is of that present recompense that we are called to speak.

In receiving the doctrines, what peace do we obtain with God, and in our own consciences!

In resting on the promises, what ineffable joy flows into our souls!

In obeying the precepts, what heavenly dispositions do we exercise, and what conformity to God do we obtain!

And lastly, in following the bright examples that are set before us—how greatly our ambition is stimulated, and our steps are advanced!

Unanswerable in every view is that appeal of God to man, "Do not my Words do good to him who walks uprightly? [Micah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 2.7)."

Address,

1. Those who neglect the Scriptures.

How vitiated is your taste, that you can prefer a novel or a newspaper to the inspired volume! That you can be anxious about the things of time and sense, and be indifferent to that which is more valuable than gold, more sweet than honey!

Ah, think what durable riches, what heavenly delights, you lose! Did you but know what reason you have for shame and regret, you would go and search the Scriptures until you had learned their value by your own experience, and had found them to be the power of God to the salvation of your souls.

2. Those who are like-minded with the Psalmist.

What do you owe to God, who has given you a spiritual taste and a spiritual discernment! By this, as much as by anything, you may know your state towards God; and you may mark, as by a scale, your progress or decline. With your advancement in the divine life, the Scriptures will rise in your estimation. With your declension in spiritual life, your relish for the Scriptures will abate. O then "let them be your meditation all the day; let them be your delight and your counselors." Thus will your spirit and temper be cast into their mold, and you will be gradually fitted for that place, where all that is now held forth to your faith, shall be forever realized.

#522

PRAYER AGAINST SINS OF INFIRMITY AND PRESUMPTION

**[Psalm 19:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.12-13)**

"Who can understand his errors?  
 Cleanse me from secret faults.  
 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins.  
 Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression."

The moral law, as revealed in the Scriptures, is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God; and is therefore a mirror in which we may see how deformed we are through the introduction and dominance of sin. It was from a contemplation of its transcendent excellence that the Psalmist was led to bewail his lack of conformity to it, and to implore mercy at the hands of God for his innumerable violations of it, and grace to preserve him from any willful opposition to it in future.

Just so, the more we study it, the more shall we be disposed to adopt the petitions in our text, "Cleanse me" from the guilt I have already contracted. "Keep me" from falling a sacrifice to my sinful propensities.

I. We all need to be delivered from sins of **infirmity**.

These are innumerable.

It is not of gross outward sin that we are here to speak, but of "errors" and "secret sins." That is, such sins as escape the notice of ourselves as well as of others.

Consider the sins arising from **defect**. The law requires that we love God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength; and our neighbor, under whatever circumstances, as ourselves. Now, if we trace the whole extent of our duty:  
to God, as our Creator;  
to the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer;  
and to the Holy Spirit, as our Sanctifier;  
if we further pursue into all the different relations of life our duty to our fellow-creatures, and reflect that the smallest short-coming in the performance of it is sin; and then, if we reflect how great our short-comings are, even when we exert ourselves to the uttermost to fulfill the will of God—we shall see that under this head alone, our sins are more numerous than the sands upon the sea-shore; since, in fact, we have been doing nothing but what, in fact, was sin, from the very first moment that we came into the world.

But besides the guilt we have contracted through defect, consider the sins which have arisen from deviations from the precise line of duty which we should have followed. We may conceive of an arrow shot in the right line towards an object, though it fall short of the object itself; and so we may conceive of our attempts to serve God, as perfect in point of aim, though defective in force and energy. But there is a bias in our fallen nature which causes innumerable aberrations from the perfect line of duty.

In duty, of whatever kind it is, the principle ought to be as pure as the light itself; but in us it never is so; somewhat of a corrupt mixture will be found in everything we do. There is . . .  
so much blindness in our understanding,  
so much perverseness in our will, and  
so much sensuality in our affections,  
that we are imperceptibly drawn aside; our very judgment is deceived; yes, "our mind and conscience are defiled;" so that, when we would do good, evil is present with us;" and, when we do, as we think, act entirely as unto the Lord, the heart-searching God beholds a mixture of self in our best motives, that serves yet further to vitiate and debase our best actions.

To all this, add our **actual** sins, by thought, word, and deed, against the holy commands of God. It is still of "secret sins" only that I am speaking, and of such as may justly be called sins of infirmity. But how vast the aggregate of evil which has arisen in our hearts from the secret workings of pride, or worldliness, or impurity, or unbelief, or some other corrupt feeling of our fallen nature! Yet not one of these has been unobserved by God, nor will one be kept out of sight in the final judgment.

Well then may we, even in this superficial view of our past errors and deviations, say, "Who can understand them?"

We need therefore to cry earnestly to God to "cleanse us from our secret faults".

The guilt in which they involve the soul is exceeding great; nor can it be purged away but by the sin-atoning blood of Christ. The circumstance of their having been unobserved by us, does not lessen the guilt of them, as we imagine; but only shows how blind and ignorant we are, and how vitiated and debased that soul must be which can harbor such evils unconscious of their malignity, and almost of their very existence. God himself cautions us against regarding this as an extenuation, which, if rightly viewed, is rather an aggravation of our guilt. "Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? [Ecclesiastes 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.6)."

An atonement was offered by the high priests of old "for the sins of the people, [Hebrews 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7)." Just so, in the atonement of Christ must we seek refuge from all sins which have been, however inadvertently, committed by us. This is strongly intimated by the offerings which were appointed for all without exception, when they erred; but which differed according to the degree of criminality which might justly attach to people, by reason of their advantages for knowing better, and the injury that was likely to accrue from their example, [Leviticus 4:1-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.1-35). But none were excused; the very moment that their error was pointed out to them, they were to bring their offering; and through that alone could they obtain absolution from their sin, [Leviticus 5:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.17-19). We should therefore, all, without exception, pray with David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Yes, we should also pray with him, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" For "God requires truth in our inward parts;" and, if we are not thus "renewed in the spirit of our minds," we cannot hope for admission into that city "where no impure thing can enter! [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.27)."

Yet, after all, our guilt from these sins is light, in comparison with that which arises from our,

II. Sins of **presumption**.

These differ widely from the former; being committed, not from mere inadvertence or infirmity, but with the concurrence of the will in opposition to the dictates of an enlightened conscience. Yet in speaking of these we shall not confine ourselves to those grosser sins, from which more moral and decent people are exempt; but shall turn your attention rather to that state and habit of life which conscience must condemn, as well as the more flagrant transgressions.

Consider what "presumptuous sins" are:

They are any sins whatever that are committed against light and knowledge, or on a presumption that God will not punish them in the eternal world.

Now it is perfectly well known to all of us, that we ought to have "the fear of God before our eyes;" we ought to stand in awe of God's judgments; we ought to search out and execute his commands. We ought not to live unto ourselves, but unto him; and to make his Word the unvaried rule of our conduct. We know that we have duties also towards our adorable Redeemer; and that, as we should live altogether by faith in him—so we should live altogether to his glory.

Now, if we are habitually neglecting these duties, and living to ourselves and to the world, what is our life but one continued course of presumptuous sin? I wish that the more moral, decent, and conscientious part of my audience would attend to this, that they may see how great their deficiencies are, and how awful their guilt.

To these "presumptuous sins" we are ever prone.

Every man by nature rushes into them, even as a horse into the battle; nor can any but God "keep us back" from them. How daring we are in the commission of them, is plain from numberless passages of Scripture, where the language of the carnal heart is depicted, "Tush! God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it." We have a general notion about God's mercy; and from the very hope that he will forbear to execute the award of justice, we are encouraged to proceed in our career of sin; thus "turning the very grace of God into a license for sin," and "continuing in sin with the hope that grace will abound." And what an ascendant these sins will gain over us may be daily seen, not only in the impieties of those who never knew anything of God, but in the degeneracy of many, who once gave promises of better things.

The downward gradations of such people's departure from God are strongly marked by the Psalmist:

they first "walk (transiently) in the counsel of the ungodly, (who, from their lack of real piety, are dangerous advisers;)

they then learn to stand (deliberately) in the way (and habits) of the wicked;

and then come to sit (habitually and at their ease) in the seat of the scornful! [Psalm 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.1)."

And this is no other than what every presumptuous sinner has reason to expect; for God is indignant against him, in proportion as his transgressions partake of this horrid aggravation. Of the heathen it is said, "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge; therefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind! [Romans 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.8)." And even of his own people Israel themselves, God says, "Israel would none of me; so I gave them up, [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12)." What wonder, then, if he should say of us also, "They are joined to idols; let them alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)."

If instead of crying mightily to God to "keep us back" from presumptuous sins, we yield ourselves willingly to the commission of them, we can expect nothing, but that they should "have the entire dominion over us," and constrain God to "swear in his wrath, that we shall never enter into his rest!" This, I say, we may well expect; for God has declared, that

If not delivered from "presumptuous sins" in time, we shall suffer the punishment of them to all eternity.

How heinous they are in the sight of God may be known from hence; that, though sacrifices were appointed for sins of infirmity, none were prescribed for any presumptuous sin whatever; the offender was to be cut off without mercy from the people of the Lord, [Numbers 15:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.27-31). The servant that knew not his lord's will, and did things contrary to it, was yet accounted worthy of some punishment; but he who knowingly violated his master's commands, was "beaten with many stripes [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48)." And Capernaum's doom, we are told, shall be more severe than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, because of the deeper malignity which her superior advantages infused into all her sins, [Matthew 11:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.23-24).

Let me then entreat you to adopt the prayer in our text; beg of God that he would enable you to:

"understand your errors;" (for who, without divine instruction, can understand them?) and that he would "cleanse you" from them; and that he would "keep you back" from every presumptuous sin; for though, every presumptuous sin is not the unpardonable sin—yet, I must say, that presumptuous sin, continued in after warnings and exhortations to depart from it, hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, and endangers the being given up by God to final impenitence.

APPLICATION.

Be prevailed upon, brethren:

1. To regard sin as the greatest of all evils.

Such indeed it is, whether you will believe it or not. You may be ready to think that suffering is the greatest evil; but suffering may tend to good; it may, like the furnace, purify us from our dross, and prepare us, under God's gracious care, as vessels of honor for our Master's use.

But sin defiles, debases, and destroys the soul. "Fools may make a mock at it;" but at last it will "sting like a serpent, and bite like an adder;" it may be sweet in the mouth, but it will be gall in the stomach.

See from what a mass of guilt and corruption you need to be delivered! See also what judgments are hanging over your cursed heads! O that I could see you in earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold on eternal life! Do not be like that perverse and daring people, who, when remonstrated with by the prophet, replied, "As for the word that you have spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto you; but we will certainly do whatever thing goes forth out of our own mouth, [Jeremiah 44:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16-17)."

Neither deceive yourselves by endeavoring to vindicate yourselves before God; for whatever you may say to extenuate your guilt, your sins even of infirmity need forgiveness; and your sins of presumption, if not repented of and forgiven—will plunge you into remediless and endless ruin!

2. To improve the present moment in order to obtain deliverance from sin.

Now you can offer the prayer of David; but how long that privilege will be continued to you, you know not. This however you know, that your views of sin will soon be changed, either in this world or in the world to come.

Conceive of a presumptuous sinner, dying in his iniquity, and first having his eyes opened in the eternal world! What does he then think of all his past excuses, on which he once placed such confident reliance? What, if he were permitted to address you from his abode of misery, would be the scope of his admonitions? Can you doubt? And, if not, will you still go on in those ways, which your own consciences condemn? But, as the Rich Man was not allowed to return from Hell to warn his surviving brethren, who were walking in his steps, so neither will any be sent from the dead, to instruct you. You have Moses and the prophets; and those you must both hear and obey; and, if you will not believe them, nothing awaits you but to "eat the fruit of your own doings, and to be filled immediately with your own devices."

Now, however, you are warned; now, I trust, your consciences attest the truth and importance of all that you have heard; and now I conclude with that solemn admonition of James, "To him who knows to do good and does it not, to him it is sin! [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17)."

#523

TRUST IN GOD, THE MEANS OF SUCCESS

**[Psalm 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 20.7)**

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God!"

Astonishing is the success of united prayer; nor are any so situated as not to need the intercessions of others. David, though so great and powerful, stood in need of them; and he here records the benefit he received from them.

The Psalmist here records,

I. The different grounds of men's confidence.

The generality make the creature their confidence.

This prevailed universally among the heathen; and it too generally pervaded the Jewish nation also. We too, in all our straits and difficulties, are prone to it:  
leaning to our understanding;  
resting on our own resolutions;  
and undertaking everything in a dependence on self.

The only proper ground of confidence is God.

He alone is all-sufficient; with him everything is easy. David abhorred the idea of resting on any other, [Psalm 121:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 121.1-2); [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4). Hence he adopted the resolution in the text.

II. The correspondent outcomes of their confidence.

Those who depend on the creature are disappointed.

This has frequently been the case, [1 Kings 20:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.23); and it is only what may be expected, [Psalm 33:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.17). Creature-confidence arms God against us, [Isaiah 31:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.1); [Isaiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.3); and entails his curse on all who indulge it, [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-6).

But those who depend on God succeed.

So did Asa, [2 Chronicles 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 14.11-12). So did Jehoshaphat, [2 Chronicles 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.12); [2 Chronicles 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.15); [2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20). So did Hezekiah 2 Chronicles 32:7; [2 Chronicles 32:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.21). So did David, verse 8. And so shall all, even to the end of the world [Psalm 34:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.22); [Psalm 125:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1-2).

Inferences:

1. What obligations do we owe to God for the mercies we have now received.

2. What shall they not receive who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?

#524

THE KINGDOM OF DAVID AND OF CHRIST

**[Psalm 21:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.1-7)**

"The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah. For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head. He asked life from You, and You gave it to him—Length of days forever and ever. His glory is great in Your salvation. Honor and majesty You have placed upon him. For You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved."

This Psalm is appointed by the Church to be read on the day of our Lord's Ascension; and on a close examination, it will appear to be well suited to that occasion.

I. We will **explain** this Psalm.

In its primary and literal sense, it expresses David's gratitude on his advancement to the throne of Israel.

After acknowledging, in general terms, God's goodness towards him in this dispensation, David speaks of his elevation as an answer to his prayers, though in its origin it was altogether unsolicited and unsought for, verse 1-4.

Impressed with the greatness of the honor conferred upon him, he exults in it, especially as affording him an opportunity of benefiting others, verses 5-6.

Then David declares his confidence that his enemies, so far from ever being able to subvert his government, shall all be crushed before him, verses 7-12.

Passing over this view of the Psalm, we proceed to observe: that it is yet more applicable to Christ, as expressing his feelings on his ascension to the throne of glory.

David was a type of Christ, as David's kingdom was a type of Christ's kingdom; and Christ, on his ascension to Heaven, may be considered as addressing his Father in the words of this Psalm.

He declares his joy and gratitude on account of the blessedness given to him, and on account of the blessedness which he was now empowered to bestow on others. With respect to his own blessedness we observe, that his conflicts were now terminated. These had been numerous and severe. From his first entrance into the world to the instant of his departure from it, he "was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." View him especially during the three years of his public ministry, what "contradiction of sinners against himself did he endure!" View more particularly the four last days of his life, what grievous and accumulated wrongs did he sustain! Consider his conflicts also with the powers of darkness, and the terrors of his Father's wrath; O what reason had he to rejoice in the termination of such sufferings, and to magnify his Father who had brought him in safety through them! For this he had prayed; and God had given him the fullest answer to his prayers, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7) with verses 2, 4.

Now also he was restored to glory. He had "a glory with the Father before the worlds were made, [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1); [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18); [John 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.5);" and of that glory he had divested himself when he assumed our nature, [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-8). But now he was restored to it; and what a contrast did it form with that state, from which he had been delivered!

A few days ago he had nowhere to lay his head—and now he is received into his Father's house, his Father's bosom. Lately he was derided, mocked, insulted, spit upon, buffeted, and scourged by the vilest of the human race—and now he is seated on his throne of glory, and worshiped and adored by all the hosts of Heaven! Great indeed was the glory that now accrued to him, and great "the majesty that was now laid upon him, verse 5." and, as it had proceeded from his Father, [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11), so he justly acknowledges it as his Father's gift.

But it was not to himself only that Jesus had respect; he blesses his Father also for the blessedness which he was empowered to bestow on others. The words, "You have made him most blessed forever," are translated in the margin of our Bibles, "You have set him to be blessings forever." This version opens a new and important view of the subject, a view which particularly accords with all the prophecies respecting Christ. It is said again and again concerning him, that "in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;" and we are well assured, that to communicate blessings to a ruined world is a source of inconceivable happiness to himself. We apprehend that to have been a very principal idea in the mind of the Apostle, when, speaking of Christ, he said, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)."

With what joy must he behold the myriads who had been exalted to glory through the virtue of his sacrifice, while yet it remained to be offered! It was through "his obedience unto death" that all the antediluvian and patriarchal saints were saved. Our First Parents looked to him as "the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head." To him righteous Abel had respect, in the offering which was honored with visible tokens of God's acceptance. To him Noah looked, when he offered the burnt-offerings, from which "God smelled a sweet savor [Genesis 8:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.20-21)."

In a word, it is through his righteousness that forbearance and forgiveness were exercised from the beginning, just as they will be exercised even to the end; and all who were saved before his advent are in that respect on the same level with those who have been saved since; there is but one song among all the glorified saints in Heaven; they are all harmonious in singing "to Him who loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood, etc." What a joy must it be to Christ to see in so many myriads the travail of his soul, who "were brought forth, as it were, to God, even before he travailed!" With what joy, too, did he then take upon him to dispense his blessings to the myriads yet unborn! He is "Head over all things," not for his own sake merely, but "for the Church's sake."

Knowing then how many of his most cruel enemies were given to him by the Father, with what pleasure would he look down upon them, (even while their hands were yet reeking with his blood,) and anticipate their conversion to God by the influence of his Spirit on the day of Pentecost! Every man that shall at any period of the world participate his grace, was at that moment before his eyes; and with what delight would he view them:  
as drawn by his Word,  
as nourished by his grace,  
as comforted by his Spirit,  
as made more than conquerors over all their enemies! [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17). At that moment he saw, as it were, the whole company of the redeemed, the multitudes which no man can number—all enthroned around him as:  
the monuments of his love,  
the heirs of his glory,  
the partners of his throne!

He saw:  
that the kingdom which he had now established upon earth "should never be moved;"  
that "the gates of Hell should never prevail against it;"  
and that it should stand forever and ever! verse 7.

Well therefore might he say, "The King shall rejoice in your strength, O Lord; and in your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!"

Having thus explained the Psalm,

II. We will show what **improvement** we should make of this Psalm.

From its literal sense we learn how thankful we should be for any blessings given unto us.

In many respects God has "gone before us with the blessings of goodness;" and in many respects he has given them in answer to our prayers. We may "account even his patience towards us to be salvation," and much more the gift of his grace, and the knowledge of his dear Son.

Can we reflect on "the salvation to which he has called us," even "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," and not be thankful for it? Can we reflect on the exaltation which we ourselves have received:  
from death to life,  
from Satan's slaves to Christ's free-men,  
from children of the devil to sons of God,  
and not rejoice in it?

Can we think of our having been made "kings and priests unto God," "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," yes, partners of his throne, and partakers of his glory for evermore; can we contemplate all this, and not say, "In your salvation how greatly shall I rejoice!" Truly, if we do not rejoice and shout for joy, "the very stones will cry out against us".

From its mystical or prophetic sense we learn what should be our disposition and conduct towards the Lord Jesus.

Methinks, we should rejoice in his joy. If it were but a common friend that was released from heavy sufferings and exalted to glory, we should rejoice with him in the blessed change; how much more then should we participate in our minds of the joy and glory of our adorable Redeemer!

But more particularly we should submit to his government. This is strongly suggested in all the latter part of the Psalm before us. "God has highly exalted Jesus, that at his name every knee should bow!" Yes, he has sworn, that every knee shall bow to him; and that all who will not bow to the scepter of his grace, shall be broken in pieces with a rod of iron. Read from the text to the end of the Psalm; and endeavor to realize every expression in it.

O that we may be wise before it is too late! Let us "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish!" For though now he condescends to follow us with entreaties to be reconciled towards him, the time is quickly coming when he will say, "Bring here those that were my enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me!"

A further improvement we should make of this subject is, to confide in his care. "He is set to be blessings" to a ruined world. He has "ascended up on high that he might fill all things;" "he has received gifts, even for the rebellious;" and "has all fullness treasured up in him," on purpose that we may "receive out of his fullness grace for grace." There is nothing that we can want, but it may be found in him; nor anything which he is not willing to bestow on the very chief of sinners. Let us then look to him, and trust in him; and assure ourselves, that, as "he lost none that had been given him" in the days of his flesh, so now will he allow "none to be plucked out of his hands." We cannot expect too much from such a King; however "wide we open our mouths, he will fill them."

To seek the enlargement of his kingdom is the last duty we shall mention as suggested by the subject before us. In the prayer that he has taught us, we say, "May your kingdom come;" and we close that prayer with ascribing to him "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever; and it is with similar opinions that the Psalm before us concludes. Let us enter into the spirit of them, saying, "Be exalted, O Lord, in your own strength; so will we sing and praise your power." Nothing should be so dear to us as the advancement of his glory. Let us reflect, how we may best promote it; and let the extension of his kingdom be our chief joy! [Psalm 72:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.18-19).

#525

TRUST IN GOD RECOMMENDED

**[Psalm 21:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.7)**

"For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved."

There is an inseparable connection between the duties and privileges of a Christian. It is his privilege to enjoy composure under all difficulties and dangers; but this he cannot possess, unless he reposes his confidence in God. Nevertheless in relying upon God, his mind shall be kept in perfect peace. David had known the storms of trouble as much as any man; but in the midst of all maintained a full assurance of divine protection. He records his experience in the words before us.

I. David's words in this text can be considered according to their original import.

This Psalm, like many other parts of Scripture, has a double sense.

In a **historical** view, David's words speaks of David himself.

David had long been habituated to trust in the Lord. When he was yet a youth, he withstood a lion and a bear in dependence upon God, 1 Samuel 17:36-37. Nor did he fear to fight Goliath, who filled all the hosts of Israel with terror, [1 Samuel 17:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.45); [1 Samuel 17:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.47). During his persecutions by Saul he still held fast his confidence; and, under the most imminent danger and accumulated trouble, encouraged himself in God, [1 Samuel 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.6).

Sometimes, indeed, his faith for a moment began to fail him, 1 Samuel 27:1; but, on the whole, he was "strong in faith, giving glory to God." Nor was he less sensible of his own insufficiency when he was a king; he still made the Most High his only and continual refuge, [Psalm 91:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.2); [Psalm 56:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.2-4); and God approved himself faithful to his believing servant. There were indeed some occasions wherein David was greatly "moved, [2 Samuel 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.30), "but these only served more fully to evince the power and faithfulness of his God! 2 Samuel 23:5.

In a **prophetic** sense, the words are applicable to Christ.

The whole Psalm has an evident reference to the Messiah. Christ is that "King" who was raised to sit upon the throne of David, [Luke 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.32); and, as for every other good thing, so was he eminent for trust in God. He disregarded the plots of his most powerful enemies, [Luke 13:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.32); and, undaunted, renewed his visit to those who had lately sought to stone him, [John 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.8). He well knew that, until his hour was come, no power on earth could touch him, [John 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.11); nor was he ever left destitute of the divine protection. He seemed indeed to be "moved" when "he was crucified through weakness;" but he soon showed how vain were the attempts of his adversaries. In his resurrection and ascension he "led captivity itself captive;" and he will in due season "put all his enemies under his feet."

In both of these views the text sets before us an instructive example.

But we may consider it further,

II. David's words in this text can be considered in reference to **the present occasion**.

The solemnities of this day prove that the former part of the text is exemplified also in our own monarch. [This sermon was preached on occasion of the king going to St. Paul's to present the colors taken in three different engagements with the French, Spanish, and Dutch fleets.]

We may therefore hope that the latter part also shall be accomplished in him.

The religious conduct of kings is of great importance to a nation. Their piety indeed is not more meritorious than that of others; but it is often more beneficial to the community than that of a private person. In the days of old, God paid especial regard to the prayers of princes, [2 Chronicles 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 14.11-12); [2 Chronicles 20:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.5-6); [2 Chronicles 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.12); [2 Chronicles 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.15); [2 Chronicles 20:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.17); [2 Chronicles 34:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 34.27) and [Isaiah 37:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.21-22); [Isaiah 37:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.33-34); even when some of these kings were of an abandoned character, God heard them, [1 Kings 21:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.29).

How much more may we hope that he will respect those offered to him this day! "The mercy of the Most High" has hitherto been signally manifested towards us, and if we trust in him it shall yet be continued to us. We do not say indeed but that, as a nation, we may be greatly "moved." It is certain that we deserve the heaviest calamities that can fall upon us; but we shall not be given up to ruin if we cry unto God for help. To the end of the world shall that promise be fulfilled to repenting nations, [Jeremiah 18:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.7-8).

We are sure that those who trust in God for spiritual blessings shall never be disappointed.

Our thoughts on this occasion are not to be confined to temporal concerns. As much as we are interested in national mercies, the welfare of our souls is yet more important; yes, our spiritual progress is the great means of obtaining God's protection to the state. Trust in God therefore, for spiritual blessings, is not foreign to the business of this day. Whatever our political opinions may be, we are all equally concerned to seek acceptance through Christ. We all need to trust in the promises made to us in him; and, if we do, "the gates of Hell shall not be able to prevail against us."

Though we have been led captive by our lusts, "we shall have redemption through his blood;" and though we have still to conflict with sin and Satan, we shall be made more than conquerors. The mercy of the Most High God shall assuredly be extended to us. Sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away than that promise fail of accomplishment, [2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20).

APPLICATION.

Let us habituate ourselves to view the hand of God in all our mercies, and to trust in him both for personal and national blessings; but let us not think that we trust in God, when in reality we do not. Trust in God necessarily implies a renunciation of all creature-confidence; it also supposes that we sincerely commit our cause to God, and that we plead the promises made to us in his Word. If we seek not the Lord in this manner, we trust rather in chance, or in our own vain conceits, than in him. Let us then be earnest in our applications at the throne of grace. Let us be exceeding thankful to God for the mercies we have received, and in every difficulty, temporal or spiritual, confide in him. Thus shall we see a happy outcome to our present troubles, and be monuments of God's truth and faithfulness to all eternity!

#526

OUR LORD'S LAMENTATION ON THE CROSS

**[Psalm 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.1)**

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
 Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"

The prophecies relating to our Lord have not only declared what works he should do, and what sufferings he should endure, but even the very words that should be uttered both by his enemies and himself. Whatever reference the words of the text might have to David, there can be no doubt but that they principally relate to the Lord Jesus; and in him they received their accomplishment. When he had hung about six hours upon the cross, we are told, "he cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli! Eli! lama sabachthani? that is to say, "My God! my God! Why have you forsaken me?" [Matthew 27:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.46)." Perhaps he cried with a loud voice in order to show, that his natural strength was by no means exhausted; and that his dissolution, which immediately followed, was voluntary; but he revealed also by that, the intenseness of his sufferings, and fulfilled in the minutest manner the prediction before us. Waving all illustration of the text as applicable to David, we shall endeavor to elucidate it as accomplished in his great antitype, and shall consider:

I. The occasion of our Lord's lamentation.

Jesus, in the hour of his extremity, was forsaken by his heavenly Father.

We are not to suppose that the godhead actually separated itself from his manhood; but that the sensible manifestation of the divine presence was withheld from him. This was necessary in various points of view. A banishment from the gracious presence of God was part of the punishment due to sin; and therefore it must be inflicted on him who had become the surety and substitute of sinners.

Occasional suspensions, also, of the tokens of God's love are the means whereby he perfects the work of faith in his people's hearts; and "it behooved Jesus to be made like unto us in all things;" "though he was a son—yet he must learn" the nature and the difficulty of "obedience (yes, and be made perfect too) through sufferings, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10); [Hebrews 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17-18); [Hebrews 5:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7-9)." Nor could Jesus properly sympathize with us, which, as our great High-Priest, he ought to do, unless he himself should endure the very temptations, which we, in our measure, are called to sustain, [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15).

It was a just ground of lamentation.

Never had he endured anything like this before; when he said, "Now is my soul troubled, it is exceeding sorrowful even unto death!" a voice was uttered from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." When he agonized in the garden, an angel was sent from Heaven to strengthen him; but now that he was more fiercely than ever assaulted by all the powers of darkness, his heavenly Father also seemed to conspire with them, and withdrew the only consolation that remained for his support. What a dreadful aggravation of his sufferings must this have been! To cry, and even "roar" for help, and find God "far from helping him," to have him, in whose bosom he had lain from all eternity, hide his face from him! How could he but lament? Surely in proportion as he loved his heavenly Father, he could not but bewail the hidings of his face.

Lest however we should form a wrong conception of our Lord's conduct, let us consider,

II. The lament itself.

Let us not suppose that there was the smallest mixture of impatience in it.

When our Lord first undertook to stand in the place of sinners, he said, "I delight to do your will, O God." When the full cup of God's wrath was put into his hand, he still acquiesced; and, though his human nature shrunk back for a while from the conflict, he committed himself to God, saying, "Not my will, but may your will be done." Nor was the lamentation uttered on the cross any other than what every godly man, under the hidings of God's face, both may and ought to utter! [Psalm 77:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.1-3); [Psalm 88:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.9-10); [Psalm 88:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14).

Jesus' lamentation expressed the fullest confidence in the Father, and exhibited the brightest pattern to all his tried people.

Not for one moment does Jesus doubt his relation to his heavenly Father, as we alas! are too apt to do in seasons of deep affliction. His repetition of that endearing name, "My God! My God!" shows how steadfastly he maintained his faith and confidence; and teaches us, that, "when we are walking in darkness and have no light, we should trust in the Lord, and stay ourselves upon our God."

We may improve the subject by considering,

III. The lessons we may learn from Jesus' lamentation.

There is not any part of doctrine or experience which will not receive light from this subject. But we shall content ourselves with observing from it:

1. Christ's unfathomable love for His people!

"God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!" [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.8)

"Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God!" [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)

Truly the love of Christ has heights and depths that can never be explored. From eternity past, He knew all that He would endure as the atoning sacrifice for our sins—and yet He freely offered Himself for us!

Never shall we form any just conceptions of His unfathomable love for us, until we behold that glory which He left for our sakes; and see, in the agonies of the damned, the miseries He endured! But when the veil shall be taken from our eyes, how marvelous will His love for us appear—and with what acclamations will Heaven resound!

"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

2. The duty of those who are under the hidings of his face.

Our enjoyment of Christ's presence is variable, and often intermitted; but let us not on that account be discouraged. Let us pray, and that too with strong crying and tears; yes, let us expostulate with him, and ask, like Job, "Why do you contend with me? [Job 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.2)." But though we say, "The Lord has forsaken me," let us never add, like the Church of old, "my Lord has forgotten me." If he hides himself, "it is but for a little moment, that he may gather us with everlasting mercies, [Isaiah 54:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-8)." Therefore let us say with Job, "Though he slay me—yet I will trust in him."

3. The misery of those who are not savingly interested in his atonement.

We see what bitter lamentation sin occasioned in him, who bore the iniquities of others, even though he knew that his sufferings would shortly end. What wailing and gnashing of teeth will they experience, who shall perish under their own personal sin and guilt—when they shall be shut up as monuments of God's wrath to all eternity! [Luke 23:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.31). O that careless sinners would lay this to heart, while yet a remedy remains, and before they are finally separated from the gracious presence of God by an impassable gulf!

#527

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

**[Psalm 22:11-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.11-22)**

"Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you!"

In many parts of the Psalms there is a strong resemblance between David's experience, and the experience of David's Lord; so that the language used, may properly be applied to both. But in some parts David speaks in terms which are wholly inapplicable to himself, and can be understood only as referring to Christ.

This is particularly the case with respect to some expressions in the Psalm before us. That a greater than David is here, there can be no doubt. The writers of the New Testament quote many parts of it as literally fulfilled in Christ; in whom alone indeed the words which I have read had any appearance of accomplishment. We scruple not therefore to consider from them:

I. The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The sufferings of our Lord Jesus are strongly manifested in his **lamentations**.

Great was the number of his enemies, and most inveterate was their rage against him. He compares them to:  
 fierce "bulls,"  
 and savage "lions,"  
 and ravenous "dogs."

Under the emblem of "the fat bulls of Bashan," he represents the Jewish Governors both in church and state; while the populace, both of Jews and Gentiles, were like dogs, set on indeed by others, but actuated by their own native ferocity, and by an insatiable thirst for blood. All ranks of people combined against him; and not so much as one was found to administer comfort to him, or to assuage his anguish. Of this he laments as a great additional source of grief and sorrow, "Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help! [Psalm 22:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.11)." "Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none!" [Psalm 69:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.20)

Exceeding deep also, and various were his sufferings:

In his body he endured all that the most cruel adversaries could inflict. He laments that his frame was so emaciated that they might "count all his bones;" that "his joints also were dislocated," and "his hands and feet pierced with nails;" and, to complete the scene, while he was suspended thus, a naked bloody spectacle upon the cross, some gazed upon him with a stupid unfeeling curiosity ("they look and stare upon me"). Others, with cruel indifference, amused themselves with "casting lots upon his clothing." Now in no sense whatever were these things at any time fulfilled in David. In relating them, he evidently personifies the Messiah, in whom they were fulfilled with the minutest possible precision.

In his soul his sufferings were far deeper still. Before his body ever was touched, "his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death! [Matthew 26:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.38)." And from whence did that anguish proceed but from the hand of the Father, who laid on Jesus the sins of the whole elect world, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10). Yes, this it was which then so oppressed and overwhelmed him. And at the same time all the hosts of Hell assaulted him; for "that was their hour, and the power of darkness." Under the pressure of these mental agonies, "he was poured out like water," or rather, was consumed, as it were, by fire, as the burnt-offerings were, even with the fire of God's wrath; insomuch that "his heart was like melted wax."

2. The sufferings of our Lord Jesus are strongly manifested in his **supplications**.

These were offered up in every diversified form of entreaty and of urgent pleas, "Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen!"

Now these petitions, I apprehend, related chiefly, if not exclusively, to the sufferings of his soul. It was "the Father's sword that had now awakened against him, to smite him," and it was "the roaring lion," even Satan, with all his hosts—that now sought to devour him.

In the midst of these accumulated troubles, he felt above all, and deprecated most urgently, the hidings of his Father's face, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" "O be not far from me, be not far from me, O Lord! verse 1, 11, 19." The plea, which in this extremity he offered, must not be overlooked, "Save me from the horns of the wild oxen." At the time of his birth had the Father interposed to deliver him from the murderous rage of Herod; and on many occasions from the Jews who sought his life; and he requested that, if possible, and consistent with the Father's purpose of saving a ruined world, the same protecting hand might be stretched out to save him now; and that the bitter cup, which he was drinking, might be removed from him. If however this could not be given to him consistently with the end for which he had come into the world, he was content to drink the cup of divine wrath even to the dregs!

If now the Son of God himself was so pressed with his sufferings, that he besought his Father "with strong crying and tears" either to mitigate the anguish, or to uphold him under it, we can have no doubt but the distress exceeded all that language can express, or that any finite intelligence can adequately conceive!

Now then ask yourselves, my brethren, in reference to these sufferings, what should be:

II. The feelings which the sufferings of Christ should excite in our bosom.

If we beheld but a common man enduring excessive anguish both of body and mind, we could not but feel some measure of sympathy with him; and, if we ourselves had been the occasion of his sufferings, and he were bearing them willingly in our place and stead—we could not but take the liveliest interest in them, both in a way of grief, that we had brought them upon him, and in a way of gratitude to him for sustaining them in our behalf. But this Sufferer was none other than our incarnate God, who came down from Heaven on purpose to bear our sins in his own sacred person, that he might deliver us from the condemnation due to them, and procure for us reconciliation with our offended God.

1. We should behold our adorable Savior with the deepest humiliation for having occasioned him such anguish.

Had we never sinned, our adorable Lord would never have assumed our nature, nor borne any of these agonies which we have been contemplating. In Christ's sin-atoning sufferings, we should measure our guilt and misery.

Was He under the hidings of His Father's face?

We deserve to be banished from the gracious presence of our God to all eternity!

Did He suffer inconceivable agonies both of body and soul, under the wrath of Almighty God?

We merited the utmost extremity of that wrath forever and ever!

Did he suffer even unto death?

We were liable to everlasting death, even that "second death in the lake that burns with file and brimstone," "where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched!"

Draw near then with me, brethren, to Gethsemane and to Golgotha, and contemplate with me the scenes which were there exhibited.

Behold that Sufferer in the garden, whose agonies of soul are so intense, that the blood issues from every pore of His body!

Behold Him on the mount, stretched upon the cross, and hear His heart-rending cry, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me!"

Say then within yourselves, 'Now I behold what my sins have merited! Or, rather, what my sins merit at this hour. There is not a moment of my life, wherein I might not justly be called upon to drink that bitter cup, without the smallest hope for even the slightest mitigation of my woe through eternal ages.'

Dear brethren, this is the looking-glass in which I wish you to behold your own deservings. I would not have your eyes turned away from it for one instant, to the last hour of your lives.

In viewing particular sins, you may perhaps be led to self-delight, from the thought that they have not been so enormous as what are habitually committed by others. But in viewing your iniquities as expiated by our blessed Lord, you will see that nothing can exceed your vileness; and you will be ready to take the lowest place as the very "chief of sinners!"

The best of you, no less than the most abandoned, have merited, and do yet daily merit, at God's hand—all that the Savior endured for you; and I again say, 'Never look at yourselves in any other looking-glass than this!'

2. We should behold our adorable Savior with the liveliest gratitude for bearing our sins in our place.

He never interposed for the angels when they fell; but for you he undertook and executed this stupendous work of "redeeming you to God by his own precious blood." This, methinks, should fill you with such wonder and love, that you should never be able to think of anything else.

In this mystery of a suffering Savior for the sins of His people, are contained "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" and all other things, however beautiful in their place, should be swallowed up by it, even as the most brilliant stars are eclipsed by the sun! Hence, this formed the one great topic of Paul's preaching; (which he calls "the preaching of the cross;") for "he determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." And in Heaven the slain Lamb in the midst of the throne, forms, among all the choir of saints and angels, the one subject of their praise. Even angels, I say, unite with the saints in singing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation! [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9)." "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! [Revelation 5:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-13)."

Oh! brethren, if our minds were more occupied in exploring the height and depth and length and breadth of redeeming love—we would not be so easily turned away from it, to the trifling vanities of this poor world. Let Christ's unfathomable love be duly and abidingly impressed upon your minds, and this subject will elevate and enlarge the soul, and have a transforming efficacy in proportion as we delight to dwell upon it.

#528

DAVID'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD

**[Psalm 23:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.1-6)**

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!"

In reading the Psalms of David we are apt to think of him as a highly privileged person, whom we can never hope to resemble in the fervor of his piety, or the height of his spiritual enjoyments. But, while as the anointed King of Israel whom God had so particularly chosen, and as a distinguished Prophet of the Lord, he was favored with communications and supports, which we are not entitled to expect. In his more private character as a saint, he possessed no advantage above us. His views of divine truth were far inferior to ours; and his experience of its efficacy was no other than what may be enjoyed by every saint in every age.

The Psalm before us is a bright specimen of devout affection; and, in point both of composition and sentiment, is universally admired; yet it contains no other recollections than what every believer's experience must afford, no other confidence than what every saint is warranted to express. Considering David then as a pattern for ourselves, we shall notice:

I. David's **retrospective**acknowledgments.

In recording the mercies of God to him, David speaks of his heavenly Benefactor under the character of,

1. A **Shepherd**.

The Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, was David's Lord, [Matthew 22:42-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.42-45), and David's Shepherd, [Genesis 49:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.24). [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.23-24). [John 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.11). And whatever pertains to the office of a good shepherd, he both executed for him, and will execute for us.

Is it the office of a shepherd to **provide**good pasture for his sheep? O what pasture is provided for us in the sacred records! David in his day could say, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters." And if he, with so small a portion of the inspired volume in his hands, when the great mystery of redemption was hidden under a veil, and the Spirit of God was yet but sparingly bestowed upon the Church, could use such language—then how much more may we, who have the meridian light of the Gospel shining around us, and the Holy Spirit poured forth in all his gracious influences, almost without measure!

What exalted views we have of the "covenant, that is ordered in all things and sure!"

What exalted views we have of the prophecies, which have been so minutely fulfilled!

What exalted views we have of "the exceeding great and precious promises," which are so suited to all our needs!

How abundant are our consolations when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, seals all these truths upon our souls, and witnesses with our spirits that we are the Lord's!

Is it the office of a shepherd to **restore**his wandering sheepto the fold, and to **guide**them in right paths?

How justly may we unite with David in saying, "He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Mark the words, "For his name's sake." It is his own glory that he has consulted in all his dealings towards us; and especially in that astonishing patience and forbearance which he has exercised towards us from day to day. Our backslidings have been so grievous, and our departures from him so frequent, that we might well have been left to perish in our sins. But he considers that his own honor is involved in the preservation of his sheep; and, therefore, he has never withdrawn his loving-kindness from us, or ceased to watch over us for good. It is on no other principle that we can account for our recoveries when fallen, and our preservation from ten thousand evils into which we would have fallen, if we had not been guided and upheld by him.

Is it the office of a shepherd to **protect**his sheep from danger? This he does, as well for the lambs of his flock, as for those that have attained a greater measure of strength. By "the valley of the shadow of death" we may understand a dying hour, [Job 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.21-22); but we rather understand by it a season of darkness and distress. This is more agreeable to the context, and better accords with the general import of those words in Holy Writ, [Psalm 107:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.10); [Psalm 107:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.14). [Jeremiah 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.16).

Sheep, in going from mountain to mountain and hill to hill, may easily be supposed to pass occasionally through valleys where dangers affright them, and difficulties obstruct their way; and in this respect the saints resemble them; for however rich their pastures for the most part may be, they find occasional seasons of darkness and gloom. But in such seasons the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great Shepherd and Bishop (Overseer) of souls, is with them, and with his pastoral rod and staff protects them. It is with that rod he numbers them when they come into his fold, [Leviticus 27:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 27.32). [Ezekiel 26:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 26.17), and with that he secures them from every harm. This he has promised to them in the most express terms, [Isaiah 43:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2-3); [Isaiah 43:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.5); and he will fulfill it even to the end, [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10).

2. A **Friend**.

This is a character which God assumed in reference to Abraham, [Isaiah 41:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.8); and our blessed Lord honors all his faithful disciples with this endearing name, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends, [John 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.15)." Now, as the friend of his people, he uses all hospitality towards them. As in the days of old he spread a table for his people in the wilderness, where they could not otherwise have subsisted—so "he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies." Enemies we have on every side; and such enemies as would deprive us of every blessing, if they were not restrained by an invisible and almighty power. But our heavenly Friend protects us from their assaults, and gives us an abundant supply of all good things, even "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."

Nor does he omit anything which can possibly evince his love towards us. As a Host who delights to honor his guests, he anoints our head with oil. And as the Master of the feast, he fills "our cup" with the richest wine, so that it "runs over." These figures, though strong and clear, very inadequately represent the communications of his grace, and the consolations of his Spirit. David, in another Psalm, says, "The Lord himself is the portion of my inheritance and my cup, [Psalm 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.5);" and when this is the case, can it be matter of surprise that "our cup runs over?" No indeed; for there is nothing on this side of Heaven that can be compared with the manifestations of his dying love. Truly, "in his favor is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself!"

While acknowledging thus the goodness of God to him in past times, the Psalmist does not hesitate to proclaim,

II. David's **prospective**consolations.

These pervade the whole Psalm, and arise out of every truth contained in it. Three of his assertions in particular we shall notice:

1. "I shall not be in want".

With such a Shepherd, and such a Friend—how could David be in real want; or what can anyone so privileged ever stand in need of? Does he not know all our needs? Is he not able to supply them, [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19). Has he not absolutely pledged himself to supply them? Is there not an inexhaustible fullness treasured up in him on purpose that he may supply them?

Do we need a righteousness wherein we may stand before God? "The righteousness of Christ shall be unto all and upon all those who believe!"

Do we need grace to mortify all our corruptions, and to fulfill the whole will of God? "His grace shall be sufficient for us!"

Do we need peace in our troubled bosoms? He has left us peace as a legacy, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." Yes, "He himself will be our peace!" Even of temporal things he has said, that "they who fear him shall lack no manner of thing that is good [Psalm 34:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.10)." Whether we look to the blessings of time or the glories of eternity, it is every believer's privilege to say: "I shall not be in want."

2. "I will not fear".

It would be presumptuous in the extreme for anyone to use such an expression as this, if he looked only to an arm of flesh; for "of ourselves we have no sufficiency even to think a good thought;" but, with such a protector as the Lord Jesus, we may laugh all our enemies to scorn.

We know how powerful, how subtle, how malignant is that "roaring lion that seeks to devour us;" and we know that we are as weak and impotent in ourselves as sheep. But if David, a man like ourselves, slew a lion and a bear that invaded his father's flock—then what shall not Jesus effect in our defense? Who shall escape his omniscient eye, or who shall withstand his omnipotent arm?

Hear what our Lord himself says, "My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places, [Isaiah 32:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.18)."

Let the timid then dismiss their fears, from whatever source they may arise. "I will fear no evil," said the Psalmist; and we, whether we take a general view of our enemies, or enter into a distinct enumeration of them—may adopt the same triumphant language, [Psalm 46:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-3). [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39). If "we know in whom we have believed, we may be assured that he will keep that which we have committed to him against that glorious day," when all his flock shall be gathered together, and be one fold under one shepherd!

3. Of my happiness there shall be no end.

Behold how confidently the Psalmist speaks on this subject! "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

What! Have you no doubt about this great matter? No; it shall be surely so.

Are you not presumptuous in speaking thus in relation to yourself? No; it shall be thus to me.

But would it not be abundantly sufficient to say, that goodness and mercy shall not turn away from you? No; they shall follow me, and that too "all the days of my life;" they shall follow me, even as my shadow does, wherever I go: "goodness," to supply my needs; and "mercy," to cover my defects. And are you bold enough to carry this confidence beyond the grave? Yes, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever;" not only serving him in his house below, but enjoying and glorifying him in his house above.

Behold here the felicity of the saints! All the rest of the world are following after happiness, and it eludes their grasp. But those who believe in Jesus have happiness following after them, "goodness and mercy" are their attendant angels, that never for a moment turn aside from them, or relax their attention to them.

The ignorant world have no idea of this blessed truth; they would account it almost blasphemy to utter such language as this. But the reason is, they know not what a Shepherd, and what a Friend, we have; did they but duly appreciate his love, they would know, that nothing within the sphere of our necessities to require, or of his ability to grant, is too great for us to expect at his gracious hands.

Enlarge then your expectations, all you who are of the fold of Christ; learn to estimate your privileges aright; see them yet more distinctly stated by the Holy Psalmist, [Psalm 91:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.15-16); and look forward to the full enjoyment of them in that house, where the same adorable Savior that now ministers unto you, will continue his ministrations to all eternity! [Revelation 7:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.15-17).

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THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST TYPIFIED

**[Psalm 24:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 24.7-10)**

"Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory. Selah."

The various rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law were extremely useful to the Jews, not merely as means whereby they were to serve their God, but as vehicles of instruction to their minds. It is true indeed that the instruction which would be conveyed by them was very imperfect; but still it was such as best suited their infant minds, and such as was well calculated to stir up in them a desire after a fuller comprehension of the things contained in them. They were to the nation at large what the parables of our Lord were to the Scribes and Pharisees of his day; they were means of fixing the attention of the people, and of stimulating them to inquiry.

But to us who have the true light reflected on those things, they are of far greater value; for, seeing them in connection with the things typified by them, we behold a fitness and a beauty in them which the people of God under the Jewish dispensation could have no idea of. Let us illustrate this from the Psalm before us.

This Psalm was written on the occasion of carrying up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion. The ark was the symbol of the Divine presence; and the carrying it up in so solemn and triumphant a way conveyed to the spectators this important truth: that to have God near unto them, where he might be sought and consulted at all times, even in the very midst of them, was an inestimable privilege.

But we behold in that ceremony, the ascension of our blessed Lord to the heavenly Zion, where he is gone for the benefit of all his waiting people. The character by which he is described is infinitely more intelligible to us than it could be to those who lived before his advent, and the benefit to be derived from his elevation is proportionably more clear. This will appear while we consider,

I. The character here given of our ascended Lord.

His ascension, as we have already said, was here represented.

The priests, with the Levites who bore the ark, demanded, in elevated strains, admission for it within the tabernacle that had been reared for its reception. The terms used, though not strictly applicable to the tabernacle, were proper to it in a figurative sense, as representing the Heaven of heavens, the peculiar residence of God. In this view it is said, "Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, you everlasting doors!" The Levites within the tabernacle, on hearing this demand, are represented as inquiring in whose behalf it is made, and who this King of glory is. The reply being satisfactory to those who had the charge of the tabernacle, the ark is borne in, and deposited in the place prepared for it.

Agreeably to this representation we may conceive of Jesus at his ascension, attended by a host of ministering angels, who, on their arrival at the portals of Heaven, demand admission for their Divine Master. The angels within inquire who that man can be in whose behalf such a claim is made. Twice is the inquiry made, and twice the answer is returned; and on the entrance of the Lord into those heavenly mansions we may conceive that the whole celestial choir unite in one exulting acclamation, "The King of glory! The King of glory!"

But the character here given of Jesus deserves more attentive consideration.

The essential dignity of our Lord is that first mentioned. As "the King of glory," and "the Lord of glory," he could claim Heaven as his own. There he had from all eternity been "in the bosom of the Father;" there he had "had a glory with the Father before the worlds were made." "From thence he had descended," for the purpose of executing the Father's will. Though he had assumed our nature, and "was found in fashion as a man"—yet he was from all eternity "in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God." He was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." He was "one with God," in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal; in a word, he was "the mighty God," "the great God and our Savior," "God over all, blessed for evermore." Well therefore might his attendant angels call on the hosts of Heaven to open wide the portals of those glorious mansions for his admission; since the Heaven of heavens were from all eternity his proper, his peculiar residence.

But he is further described as "the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." The reason of his descent from Heaven had been to rescue a ruined world from the dominion of sin and Satan, death and Hell. "The god of this world" had his vassals in complete subjection; as "a strong man armed he kept his house, and all his goods were in peace." But Jesus entered into conflict with him, and "bound him and spoiled his goods;" or, in other words, delivered from his sway millions of the human race, who had not only been "led captive by him at his will," but would ultimately have been "bound with him in chains of everlasting darkness!" True indeed, he himself received a wound in the engagement; ("his heel was bruised,") but he inflicted a deadly wound on "the head" of his enemy, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15), and vanquished him forever. It may be said indeed that he himself died in the conflict; he did so, and appeared to be "crucified through weakness;" but it was not through weakness that he died, but in compliance with his own engagement to "make his soul an offering for sin." His death was to be the very means of victory; it was "through death that he overcame him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered those who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage."

On his cross he not only "spoiled all the principalities and powers of Hell, but made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it;" and in his ascension "he led them captive," bound, as it were, to his chariot-wheels.

This constituted a further claim to the mansions of Heaven. It had been covenanted on his Father's part, that after his conflicts on earth, he should be raised in his manhood to the right hand of God, and that, thus enthroned, he should put every enemy under his feet! [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1). This was now to be fulfilled; the victory was gained; and nothing now remained to complete the glorious work but the installation of Messiah on his promised throne. Hence the exulting reply to the inquiry, "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle; the Lord Almighty, He is the King of glory!" and, as such, he comes to take possession of his throne, and calls on all the hosts of Heaven to celebrate and adorn his triumphs.

But to participate in the joy expressed in our text, we should understand.

II. The saving interest we have in his ascension.

It is not as a private individual that he has ascended, for then we should have mourned as Elisha did for Elijah, and as the Apostles were disposed to do, when he advertised them of his intentions to depart from them. But we have reason rather to rejoice in his departure, yes, far more than if he had continued upon earth to the present hour, [John 14:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.28).

1. Jesus has ascended as **our Great High Priest**.

The office of the High Priest was but half performed when he had slain the sacrifice; he must carry the blood within the veil, to sprinkle it upon the Mercy-seat; and he must burn incense also before the Mercy-seat.

Now our blessed Lord was to execute every part of the priestly office; and therefore he must carry his own blood within the veil, and present also the incense of his continual intercession before the Mercy-seat. Agreeably to this we are told, "that by his own blood he is entered into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us;" that "he has gone to appear in the presence of God for us;" and that "he ever lives to make intercession for us! [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25); [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12); [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)."

What a blessed thought is this!

Have I a doubt whether my sins shall be forgiven? Behold, he is at this very moment pleading in his Father's presence the merit of his blood, which is a sufficient "atoning sacrifice not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world."

Have I a doubt whether God will hear my unworthy petitions? Behold, Jesus, my Great High Priest, will secure, by his own prevailing intercession, an everlasting acceptance both of my person and services at the hands of Almighty God.

2. Jesus has ascended as **our living Head**.

Jesus is the Head and Representative of his people; insomuch that they may properly be said to be even at this time "sitting in and with him in heavenly places, [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.6)." But he is also our Head of vital influence, having all fullness of spiritual blessings treasured up in him, in order that we may receive out of it according to our necessities, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9).

Adam at first had, as it were, a treasure of grace committed to his own custody; and he lost it even in Paradise. How much more then would we lose it, who are corrupt creatures in a corrupt world, if it were again left in our own keeping! But God has now taken more effectual care for us. He has given us into the hands of his own Son; and our life is now placed out of the reach of our great Adversary, "it is hidden with Christ in God."

Do we want wisdom, or righteousness, or sanctification, or complete redemption? It is all treasured up for us in Christ, who "is made all unto us! [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)." It is out of his inexhaustible fullness that we all receive one blessing after another! [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). And, as the sun in the firmament is the one source of all the light that we, or any other of the planets, receive, so is Christ, of all the spiritual blessings that are enjoyed on earth, "He is head over all things to the Church;" and "he fills all in all! [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23)."

3. Jesus has ascended as **the Forerunner of all his people**.

By that very name is he called, in reference to his entrance within the veil, [Hebrews 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19-20). Indeed previous to his departure he expressly told his disciples, that he was going to prepare a place for them, in order at a future period to come and take them to himself, that they might be with him forever! [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3). He is gone up to Heaven as the first-fruits, which sanctified and assured the whole harvest, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20). Soon is he coming again from thence, to take home his people who wait for him. Not one will he leave behind. At whatever period or place they died, they "shall hear his voice," they shall "meet him in the air, they shall be ever with the Lord! [John 5:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.28). [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.16-17)."

When he was upon the earth he appeared like other men, and died laden with the iniquities of a ruined world; but in due time he will appear again, without sin, in all the glory of his Father and of his holy angels, to the complete and everlasting salvation of all who look for him! [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28). [1 Thessalonians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.18). "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

Improvement.

Is our blessed Lord ascended to the highest heavens?

Then,

1. Let our **affections** be where He is.

This is the improvement which Paul himself teaches us to make of this subject, [Colossians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-2) with [Philippians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.17); [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20). What is there worth a thought, in comparison with this adorable Savior, who has died for us, and is yet every moment occupied in the great work of our salvation, exerting all his influence with the Father in our behalf, and communicating continually to our souls all needful supplies of grace and strength?

2. Let our **dependence** be upon him.

It may be said, that, having been quickened from the dead, we have now a new and spiritual life within us; but it must not be forgotten, that the life we have is not so committed to us, that we have it in, and of, ourselves. As light in our dwellings is derived from, and altogether dependent on, the sun in the firmament—so is the life that is infused into our souls entirely derived from, and dependent on, the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence Paul says, "I live; yet not I; but Christ lives in me;" and then he adds, "And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me [Galatians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.20)."

Thus it must be with us. We must remember that "all our fresh springs are in him;" and from him must we derive all our vital energy, as branches from the stock, and as members from the head. A life of faith in him is equally necessary for every human being. In ourselves we are all wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and to him must we equally be indebted:  
for eye-salve to restore our sight,  
for clothing to cover us, and  
for gold to enrich our souls! [Revelation 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17-18).

To him must we go for sanctifying grace from day to day; and from him must we obtain grace, "without money and without price! [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)."

3. Let us be looking forward to, and preparing for, a similar entrance into his glory.

The apostle Paul assures us, that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then we shall also appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)." Yes, as soon as ever the judgment shall be past, then shall he, at the head of his redeemed people, demand admission for them all into the highest heavens, "Lift up, etc. etc and the King of glory, with all his redeemed, shall enter in!" What shouts will then resound throughout all the courts of Heaven! "The King of glory! The King of glory!" No other name will then be heard but that of our Redeeming God, to whom all possible "praise and honor and glory will be ascribed, even to Him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever!"

"Look then for this glorious period, and haste unto it," as the consummation of all your hopes, and the completion of all your joys! [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12). And by adding virtue to virtue, and grace to grace, ensure to yourselves an entrance, not like that of a mere wreck, but like a ship in full sail, even "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! [2 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.5); [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11)."

#530

THE SAINT PLEADING WITH GOD

**[Psalm 25:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.6-7)**

"Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. According to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD."

At what precise period this Psalm was written, is not certainly known; but probably about the time of Absalom's rebellion. It is evident that David's sorrows were very great, verses 16, 17; but those which appear to have pressed with the greatest weight upon his mind arose from a view of his past transgressions, and probably from that flagrant iniquity committed by him in the matter of Uriah, verses 11, 18.

His mode of pleading with God is that to which I propose, in a more especial manner, to draw your attention, because it affords an excellent pattern for us, in all our approaches to the throne of grace.

Let us notice,

I. What David desires.

He desires God to "remember the tender mercies and loving-kindnesses" with which he had favored him in times past. Now this is almost the last petition which we should have expected from a person mourning under a sense of sin, because the kindness of God to us forms one of the greatest aggravations of our sins. God himself made this the ground of his complaint against his people of old, "What could I have done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? And when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought it forth wild grapes?" But David had a just view of God's tender mercies; he regarded them as pledges of yet richer blessings in reserve for him; and in this view his request deserves particular attention.

God's mercies are the fruits of his electing love.

God dispenses his blessings to whoever he will. He has a right to do so; for there is no creature in the universe that has any claim upon him. As well might the devils complain of him, for not giving a Savior to them—as any of us complain of him for not bestowing on us the grace which he imparts to others. In what he does, he consults his own glory alone; and, however rebellious man may arraign his counsels—he will be eternally glorified in all that he has done; it will all be found "to his praise and honor and glory" in "the day which he has appointed for the revelation of his righteous judgments."

David was sensible of his obligations to God in this respect. He traced all his mercies to their proper source: the eternal counsels of God; who had given them to him, not for any righteousness of his, either seen or foreseen, but "according to his own purpose and grace, which had been given to him in Christ Jesus before the world began, [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)." He saw that "God had loved him with an everlasting love," and therefore with loving-kindness had God drawn him to the actual enjoyment of his favor.

In this view, God's past mercies may be regarded as pledges of future blessings.

God is unchangeable, no less in his counsels than in his perfections, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6). In no respect is there with him "any variableness, or shadow of turning, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)." "His gifts and calling are without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)." Hence, if he remembers his former mercies, he will continue them. "He will not forsake his people for his great name's sake, because it has pleased him to make them his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22)." He has said, "I will never, never leave you; never, never forsake you, [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5);" so that, if we have indeed experienced his loving-kindness in our souls, we may "confidently hope that he will carry on and perfect his work within us, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6);" for "whom he loves, he loves to the end! [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1)."

Here, then, we see what was in the mind of David when he urged this petition. He had found consolation from this thought in the midst of the deepest distresses. When tempted, on one occasion, to think that "God had cast him off, and would be favorable to him no more, but had in anger shut up his tender mercies, so that his promise would fail for evermore," he "called to mind God's wonders of old time," and thus composed his mind, and assured himself that his fears were groundless, the result only of "his own infirmity, [Psalm 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.6); [Psalm 77:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.6-11)."

In any troubles, therefore, which we may experience, we shall do well to look back upon God's mercies of old, and to take encouragement from them to cast ourselves upon him, for the continuance of them.

Let us next observe,

II. What David deprecates.

Sin, in whoever it is found, is most offensive to God.

God "cannot look upon iniquity without the utmost abhorrence, [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13)," both of the act itself, and of the person who has committed it. Hence, when he forgives sin, he "blots it out, even as a morning cloud, which passes away, and is no more seen, [Isaiah 44:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.22)." God has put it altogether out of his own sight; he has "cast it behind his back, [Isaiah 38:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.17)," "into the very depths of the sea, [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19)," from whence it shall never be brought up again.

If sin were remembered by him, he must punish it; and therefore, to those who turn unto him, and lay hold on his covenant, he promises, that "their sins and iniquities he will remember no more, [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12)."

On this account David deprecates the remembrance of his sins.

He specifies, in particular, "the sins of his youth," which, though committed through levity and thoughtlessness, were displeasing to God, and must entail his judgments on the soul. Little do young people think what their views of their present conduct will be, when God shall open their eyes—whether it is in the present or the future life. They now imagine that they have, as it were, a licence to indulge in sin, and to neglect their God. They conceive, that serious piety at their age would be premature and preposterous; and that, if they only abstain from gross immoralities, they may well be excused for deferring to a later period the habits that are distasteful to a youthful mind.

But these are vain and delusive imaginations. God views their conduct with other eyes. He does not accept those frivolous excuses with which men satisfy their own minds. God sees no reason why the earlier part of life should be consecrated to Satan, and the dregs of it alone be reserved for him. He demands the first-fruits as his peculiar portion; and if the first-fruits of the field, much more the first-fruits of the immortal soul.

O! my young friends, I entreat you to reflect how different God's estimate of your conduct is, from that which you and your thoughtless companions form; and how bitterly you will one day deprecate his remembrance of those sins, which now you pass over as unworthy of any serious consideration.

But David adverts also to the transgressions which, through weakness or inadvertence, he yet daily committed. And who among us is not conscious of manifold transgressions in his daily walk and conduct? Who is not constrained to say, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord;" "if you should be extreme to mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?"

Thus, then, let us also implore God to blot out our sins from the book of his remembrance, that they may never appear against us in the day of judgment, and, "if sought for" with ever so much diligence, may never, "never be found! [Jeremiah 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.20)."

Let us mark yet farther,

III. What David proposes as the rule and measure of God's dealings with him.

David founds all his hope on the mercy of God.

Mercy is the favorite attribute of God. Mercy delights to spare the offending, and to save the penitent. It is ready to fly at the call of guilt and misery; and hastens to execute the dictates of God's sovereign grace. Mercy demands no merit as the price of its blessings; it accounts itself richly recompensed in bringing glory to God, and happiness to man. Hence David prayed, "According to your mercy, remember me!"

When speaking of God's interposition between him and his persecutors, he could say, "The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands has he recompensed me, [Psalm 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.20)." But he would not presume to make his own righteousness the ground of his hope towards God. For acceptance with him, he would rely on nothing but mercy, even the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Herein he has set us an example which we shall do well to follow; in all our addresses to the Most High God, we should adopt his prayer, and say, "Deal with your servant according to your mercy! [Psalm 119:124](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.124)." There is solid ground. There the most holy of the saints must come; and there the vilest sinner upon earth may find a rock whereon to stand with confidence before God. With such a ground of hope, David could approach his God, and say, "Be merciful unto my sin; for it is great!"

From "the goodness of God, too," David derives his only plea.

David well knew that God is most glorified in those exercises of mercy which most display his sovereignty and his grace. Hence he desired that God would have respect to his own honor, and show mercy to him for his goodness' sake. Thus must we, also, take our arguments from the perfections of our God; and have all our hope, and plea, and confidence in him alone.

To this I will only add,

1. Let us follow the example of David.

We all have need to come to God precisely in the manner that David did. We have no more worthiness in ourselves than he. If judged by anything of our own, we can have no hope whatever. We must stand precisely on the same ground as he, and urge the very same pleas as he. Our first, and last, and only cry must be,  
"Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask;  
This is the total sum;  
For mercy, Lord, is all my plea:  
O let your mercy come!  
"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions! [Psalm 51:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.1)."

2. Let us take encouragement from the acceptance with God which David found.

His sins, as great as they were, were all forgiven. And when did God ever reject the prayer of faith? To whom did he ever say, "Seek my face in vain?" Read the whole of the fifty-first Psalm, and let it be a model for your supplications, day and night. Then shall your prayer come up with acceptance before God, and your seed-time of tears, issue in a harvest of eternal joy!

#531

MEEK DOCILITY INCULCATED

**[Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9)**

"The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek he will teach his way."

The necessity of a revelation from God is universally acknowledged; for no man could possibly know God's will, unless God himself should be pleased to communicate information respecting it from above. But the necessity for any divine influence upon the soul, in order to a due improvement of a revelation already given, is not generally admitted. But we are expressly told, that "all God's children shall be taught by him;" and both the goodness and integrity of God are pledged for the performance of the promise, verse 8. There are, however, certain qualifications which we must possess, before the offered benefits can be extended to us; and what they are, it is my intention, in this present discourse, to set before you.

Let me then state,

I. What dispositions are necessary for a reception of divine truth.

The term "meekness" is of very extensive import. But, instead of entering into the variety of senses in which the word is used, we shall find it more profitable to confine ourselves to the precise view in which it is used in the passage before us.

1. Men may be denominated "meek," when they are sensible of their own ignorance.

Ignorant we are, whether we are sensible of it or not. The fall of man has proved no less injurious to his intellectual powers than to his heart.

"His understanding is darkened;"  
"the god of this world has blinded his eyes;"  
"he is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, and because of the blindness of his heart."

But men are unconscious of this. They feel that their powers are strong for the investigation of human sciences; and they see no reason why they should not be equally so for the comprehension of things relating to the soul. They are ready to resent any intimation of their spiritual blindness, as the Pharisees did of old, "Are we blind also? [John 9:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.40)."

Very different is their conduct, when they are become truly "meek." Then they perceive their lack of spiritual discernment, 2 Corinthians 2:14. They feel that no efforts of flesh and blood will suffice for the illumination of their minds! [Matthew 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.17); and that they need "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that they may know the things that are freely given to them of God, [1 Corinthians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.12)."

2. Men may be denominated "meek," when they are willing and desirous to be taught by God.

As man by nature is not sensible of his own blindness, so has he no wish to obtain a spiritual insight into the things of God. He is satisfied with a speculative knowledge; and, if he possesses that which may be apprehended by reason, and which may be attained by his own personal exertions—then he has all that he desires. All beyond that is, in his estimation, a vain conceit.

But a person who possesses a meek disposition desires to be taught of God, and to be guided into all truth. He is not contented with abiding in the outer court of the temple; but longs to be introduced within the veil, even into the sanctuary of the Most High, in order that he may behold God shining forth in all his glory, and receive from him the richest possible communications of his grace and love.

For this end, whenever he opens the inspired volume, he lifts up his heart to God, and prays, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your Law!" In relation to the whole work of redemption, whether as revealed in the Word, or as experienced in the soul—he desires to hear God himself, and be "taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, [Ephesians 4:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.20-21);" and he pleads with God that most encouraging promise, "Call upon me, and I will show you great and mighty (hidden) things, which you know not! [Jeremiah 33:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 33.3)."

Such are the dispositions which characterize the people whom God will instruct.

We are next to show,

II. Whence arises the necessity for meekness.

1. There is, in the whole scope and tenor of the Gospel, a **contrariety to our carnal reason**.

The substitution of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son in the place of sinners, his vicarious sacrifice, his bringing in a righteousness by the imputation of which sinners may be justified before God, and his imparting all the blessings of redemption to them, through the exercise of faith, and without any respect whatever to their works—these are truths to which carnal reason is extremely averse. They are among "those things of the Spirit which the natural man neither does, nor can, receive."

A man may, indeed, adopt these things as his creed, and may account an opposition to them as heresy; while yet he has no spiritual acquaintance with them in his own soul. But to see the excellency of them, to love them, to delight in them, to "account all things but dung for the knowledge of them," is an attainment which the natural man has no idea of, and which, instead of desiring, he hates. They form altogether a mystery.

Hence, until he is humbled before God, he cannot possibly comprehend these things; they are a stumbling-block to him; they are mere "foolishness" in his eyes!

2. There is, in the whole scope and tenor of the Gospel, an **opposition to our depraved appetites**.

The Gospel calls upon us to "mortify our members upon earth," yes, and to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;" and to such an extent does it require the subjugation of our corrupt appetites, that, if there be a thing as dear to us as a right eye, it calls upon us to pluck it out, or a thing as useful as a right hand, to cut it off.

How can such doctrines as these be received by a proud, unmortified, and unhumbled spirit? It is not possible but that there should be the utmost repugnance to them in all who feel not the value of their own souls, and desire not above all things to obtain peace with God.

In truth, the doctrines of Christianity are not a whit more offensive to the reason of the natural man, than the duties of it are to his corrupt affections; which, therefore, must be mortified, before he can acquiesce in them as good and right.

3. There is, in the whole scope and tenor of the Gospel, an **inconsistency with our worldly interests**.

The instant we embrace the Gospel with our whole hearts, the world will become our enemies. They hated and persecuted the Lord of glory himself; can we suppose that the disciple will be above his Lord? Or that, if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, they will not find some opprobrious names for those also of his household? We are taught by our Lord that we must be hated by all men for his name's sake; and that, if we will not take up our cross daily, and follow him, we cannot be his disciples. Nay more; if we are not willing to forsake all, and even to lay down our lives for him, we cannot be partakers of his salvation.

But what will an earthly mind say to this? Will not a faithful declaration of these things draw forth that reply which was given to our Lord, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" Many, when our Lord proclaimed these things, turned back, and walked no more with him; and this cannot but be the result with every carnal and worldly mind, when such sacrifices are required.

Hence, then, it is evident, that, unless a very great change is wrought in the heart of an unconverted man, he neither will, nor can, be in a state to receive truths to which his whole nature is so averse! If he meekly desired to do God's will, the film would be removed from his eyes, and he would be able to appreciate the things which are set before him in the Gospel; but, until he becomes thus "meek" and docile, he will be inaccessible to the light, or rather, the light itself will only augment his blindness!

That all may be encouraged to seek these necessary dispositions, I proceed to notice,

III. The promise made to those who are possessed of them.

It has already appeared, that men, by the Fall, have suffered loss both in their intellectual and moral powers. And, in both respects, shall they be restored to a rich measure of their pristine dignity, if only they cultivate the dispositions which God requires.

1. God will "guide the meek in judgment".

They see at present through a dense and delusive medium; and hence everything relating to God assumes, in their eyes, an odious and distorted shape. But God will rectify their views; he will enable them to discern everything in its proper colors, and to see its bearings on the welfare of the soul.

The excellency of salvation through the crucified Redeemer,  
the blessedness of having all our corruptions mortified,  
and the wisdom of sacrificing all our worldly interests to the welfare of the soul—  
these, and all other truths connected with them, shall be brought home to the mind with an evidence which it cannot doubt, and with a power which it cannot withstand. Or, to use the expressive language of the Psalmist, "In the hidden part God shall make them to know wisdom, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6)."

In a word, he will bring the soul out of darkness into marvelous light; so that it shall no more call evil good, and good evil; but shall "be guided into all truth," and shall "have the very mind that was in Christ Jesus."

2. He will enable the meek also, to walk in his ways.

Gospel truths do not float in the minds of a genuine Christian as a mere theory or speculation—but influence their affections, their speech and their acts in a most practical way. God will, by his Word and Spirit, recover them from their wanderings, and guide their feet into the way of peace. And, if at any time they are for a moment turned aside through error of judgment, or instability of mind, he will cause them to "hear a word behind them, saying, This is the way, walk in it!" He will go before them, as he did before the Israelites in the wilderness, causing his Word to be a light to their feet and a lantern to their paths; and thus "he will guide them by his counsel, until he shall finally receive them to glory!"

Here, then, we may see,

1. Why it is that the blessings of the Gospel are so pre-eminently enjoyed by the poor.

It is a fact, that "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called;" but that "God has revealed to babes and sucklings the things which, to so great an extent, are hidden from the wise and prudent."

The wise and great are too generally under the influence of self-sufficiency and self-dependence. They cannot bow to the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel. They will not endure to view themselves in so destitute a condition as the Gospel represents them. Hence they, almost universally, "stumble at the word, being disobedient."

But the poor are more easily brought to see that they need instruction from above; their very incompetency to enter into deep researches of any kind gives them a comparative distrust of their own powers, in relation to the things of God. Hence they see but little to stumble at in those points which the wise and learned find most difficult to overcome; and, being more easily brought to seek instruction from God, they, in far greater numbers, are taught of God, and almost engross to themselves, as it were, the possession of his kingdom.

O, you poor ones, never repine at your lot; but rather rejoice that you are of the happy number of those whom God has chosen chiefly, though not exclusively, "to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom."

And, you rich or learned, seek to "become as little children," and be willing to "become fools, that you may be truly wise!"

2. Why it is that there are so many falls and errors in the religious world.

People, when they have embraced the truth, are but too apt to lose the simplicity of their earlier days, and to become wise in their own conceits. Hence many of them fall into errors of divers kinds; and frequently dishonor, by their conduct, their holy profession.

Alas! alas! what a picture does the religious world present! See what controversies and animosities prevail among those who profess themselves children of one common Father! Dear brethren, dreadful is the advantage which our great adversary gains by these means.

Remember, I beg you, that your growth in grace is to be shown, not by a proud dogmatizing spirit, but by a spirit of meekness, and humility, and love. He is most acceptable to the Lord Jesus, who most resembles a little child; and he shall have the richest fellowship with God, who, with most lowliness of heart, implores his continual aid.

In reading the Holy Scriptures therefore, and under the public ministration of the Word, be careful not to lean to your own understanding, but to trust in God for the teaching of his Spirit; that "receiving the Word with meekness, as an engrafted word," you may find it effectual to sanctify and "save your souls!"

#532

GOD'S PATHS ARE MERCY AND TRUTH

**[Psalm 25:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.10)**

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto those who keep his covenant and his testimonies."

It has often been observed that there is in the world an indiscriminate distribution by God, of good and evil, without any respect to men's moral characters. And this is confirmed by Solomon, who says, "All things come alike to all, neither does any man know whether love or hatred await him." This, however, must be understood with certain limitations and restrictions; for, as in chemical preparations one ingredient will entirely change the qualities of the thing prepared, so in the dispensations of Providence will one single ingredient wholly change their nature, while, in appearance, they remain the same.

God often sends temporal blessings to his enemies in anger, for the purpose of displaying in him the power of his wrath—as we see when he raised up Pharaoh to a throne. On the contrary, the bitterest cup that he puts into the hands of his friends is mixed with love. The eye of faith therefore will discern a most essential difference, where sense and reason can see none. It will see that however God may load the wicked with benefits, "he is angry with them every day." It will see however he may visit the righteous with the rod, "all his paths are mercy and truth unto them." To elucidate this truth, let us consider,

I. The character of the godly.

Among the numberless marks whereby the godly are described in Scripture, there are not any more deserving of our attention than those before us:

1. They keep God's covenant.

The covenant here spoken of cannot be the covenant of works, because no man is able to keep that, seeing that it requires perfect and unsinning obedience. We understand it therefore as relating to the covenant of grace, wherein God undertakes to give us pardon, holiness, and glory, for the sake of his dear Son, who is the Mediator of it, and in whose blood it is ratified and confirmed. Compare [Jeremiah 31:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31-34) with [Hebrews 8:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10-12).

Now this covenant every godly person "keeps." He embraces it gladly, being well persuaded, that if the tenor of it were not precisely what it is, he could have no hope. If the covenant required the performance of certain conditions on his part, without providing him with strength to perform those conditions, and pardon for his innumerable failures and defects—then he would sit down in despair. But seeing that the covenant is ordered in all things and sure, and that Jesus, the surety of it, has guaranteed to God the accomplishment of its demands, and to us the enjoyment of its blessings, every believer rejoices in it, and cleaves to it steadfastly with his whole heart.

2. They keep God's testimonies.

While the believer is thus attached to the Gospel covenant, he does not relax his obedience to the law. On the contrary, whatever God has testified to be his will—that the believer labors to fulfill. He would not wish to live in sin, though he might do it with impunity; nor does he account one of the commandments grievous; but rather he esteems them all concerning all things to be right, [Psalm 119:128](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.128). His complaints are not against the law as too strict, but against his own heart, as treacherous and vile. With respect to the testimonies of God, he says, with David, "I claim them as my heritage forever; yes, they are the rejoicing of my heart; they are sweeter to me than honey and the honey-comb."

Such, in other parts of God's Word, is the description given of the godly, [Isaiah 56:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.4-5). [Psalm 103:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.17-18). We should therefore inquire into our faith and practice, in order that we may ascertain our real character. For if we are harboring self-righteousness on the one hand, or hypocrisy on the other, we have no part in this covenant, nor any interest in its blessings. Whether we reject the covenant or dishonor it, we are equally destitute of grace, and equally liable to God's eternal displeasure. To have a good evidence of our acceptance with God, we must trust as simply in the covenant as if no works were required; and be as earnest in the performance of good works, as if only works were required.

Having delineated the character of the godly, let us next consider,

II. The dealings of God towards the godly.

It might be supposed that people so pleasing to God should never suffer affliction; but the contrary is true, as appears, not only from the declarations of Scripture, [Zephaniah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.12). [Psalm 34:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.19), but from the experience of all who have been most favored of God Job, David, Paul, and, above all, Christ himself.

1. All of God's dealings towards the godly are in **mercy**.

There are no dispensations, however afflictive, which are not sent to them for good. They are all mercy in their source, their measure, their end. Whence do they spring, but from the love of God? for, "whom he loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." They are all mercifully tempered as to their number, weight, and duration. Has there not "with every temptation been opened also a way to escape," or "strength given according to our day, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6). [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)." And have they not all wrought for good:  
to wean us from the world,  
to purge away sin,  
to exercise and increase our grace,  
to give to us the comfort of grace bestowed,  
and to God the glory of it?

Is there one of us who must not confess, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted!" And shall we not say that our light and momentary afflictions have been rich mercies, when we find what a weight of glory they have wrought out for us?

2. All of God's dealings towards the godly are in **truth**.

Truth has respect to the performance of promises. Now afflictions are expressly promised as much as salvation itself, [Jeremiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.11). When therefore they come, we should regard them as the accomplishment of God's Word, wherein he has said, that he will withhold no good thing from us. It was in this light that David viewed them, when he said, "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me! [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.75)." And it is in consideration of this, that we are taught to consider, not merely life with all its comforts, but even death also with all its antecedent evils, as a treasure given to us by God, 1 Corinthians 3:22.

Inferences:

1. How excellent a grace is faith!

It is faith, and faith alone, that can enable us to view God's dispensations in this light. If we are weak in faith, we shall be easily drawn to fretfulness and murmuring; but if we are enabled to see the hand of God in our trials, they will all administer occasions of joy and gratitude. Faith is the magic potion which turns all to gold, and enables us to glory in that, which, to flesh and blood, is a source of sorrow and disquietude. Let us, then, cultivate this grace, and keep it in continual exercise; and, if anything occurs, the reasons of which we cannot immediately comprehend, let us content ourselves with saying, 'What I know not now, I shall know hereafter.'

2. How resigned should the believer be under all his troubles!

Nothing can come to him which is not the fruit of God's mercy and truth. Not so much as a hair can fall from his head but by divine appointment!

Believer, are you sick and in pain? God knows that health and ease would have been harmful to your soul.

Have you sustained some heavy loss? God sees, perhaps, that the thing which you have lost might have been a weight about your feet, and have retarded you in running your race.

Are you persecuted by the world, or tempted by Satan? It is a discipline whereby God is preparing you for future victories, and everlasting triumphs.

These may be mercies in disguise; but they are mercies notwithstanding; and therefore should be received with resignation, and improved with diligence.

3. How lamentable is the state of unbelievers!

While we disregard God's covenant and his testimonies, we neither enjoy any mercy, nor have a saving interest in any promise. On the contrary, our very blessings are cursed to us, and every threatening in God's Word is in full force against us. Moreover, our troubles are pledges of infinitely heavier calamities that shall come upon us in the eternal world! Let us, then, if we are yet in unbelief, embrace the covenant of grace, and set ourselves diligently to keep the testimonies of our God. So shall the blessings of the covenant flow down upon us, and we shall know by happy experience, that "the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endures from generation to generation!"

#533

PROPER METHOD OF PRAYING TO GOD

**[Psalm 25:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.11)**

"For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, though it is great."

God is a almighty Sovereign, "who does according to his own will," "neither gives account to us of any of his matters." We may indeed mark the traces of wisdom and goodness in everything which he does; but "his ways and his thoughts are very different from ours, and far above them."

In the dispensations of his providence he pays no regard to the moral characters of men, but "makes the sun to shine equally upon the evil and the good."

In the dispensations of his grace too, he is far from preferring those whom we should think he would select. He often inclines the hearts of "publicans and harlots to enter into his kingdom," while he leaves less abandoned Religionists, Pharisees and Formalists to perish in their sins. This, if it is a humiliating truth, is also replete with comfort. If it takes away all grounds of boasting, it cuts off at the same time all occasion for despondency. If he "has a right to do what he will with his own," the vilest person in the universe may approach him with a comfortable hope of acceptance and may address him in the language of the text.

In these words of the Psalmist we may notice,

I. David's **Confession**.

David was not ashamed to confess that his sins were exceedingly great.

There is no reason to think that David in this Psalm adverts to his transgression with Bathsheba. It is probable that the Psalm was penned many years before that event. The Royal Penitent speaks rather of his indwelling corruptions. He had long been accustomed to observe the workings of his own heart, and had often besought God to search and try him to the uttermost, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24). In this way he had marked both the defects of his duties, and the evil propensities of his nature; and, from a review of all his actions, words, and thoughts, was led to acknowledge that his sin was exceeding great. Nor was this confession peculiar to him.

Holy Job, as soon as he beheld his true character, exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile! [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4)."

Paul no sooner became acquainted with the purity and extent of God's law, than he saw himself a condemned sinner, and confessed, that "in him dwelt no good thing! [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9); [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18)."

And does not a similar confession befit us also?

Let us only review our past lives, and we shall find much occasion for the deepest humiliation.

Have not many of us been addicted to open, known iniquities? And do not the consciences of such people testify against them that their sin is great?

Have not many also devoted all their time and attention to secular concerns? And will they account it a light thing thus to despise God, and idolize the world?

Have not others satisfied themselves with a formal round of duties, in which their souls were never earnestly engaged? And can they suppose that God is pleased with a mere lip-service, when their hearts are far from him?

Have not others professed godliness indeed, but walked utterly unworthy of their profession, being as proud, and passionate, as worldly too, and covetous—as those who have made no such profession? And can they suppose their sin is not great, when sinners are hardened, and God is blasphemed through their means?

But why do we speak of the profane and worldly, or the formal and hypocritical? Must not even the saints themselves blush and be confounded, when they consider how miserably they have fallen short in everything? Must they not exclaim with Paul, "O wretched man that I am!" Surely we must know little indeed of ourselves, if we do not all see how much the confession in the text is suited to our state.

When, like David, we are duly humbled under a sense of our guilt, we shall readily adopt,

II. David's **Petition**.

David could not rest without imploring forgiveness at God's hands.

He found a sense of guilt to be an intolerable burden to his soul, [Psalm 38:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.4); and well knew that it would "eat as a canker," until he had obtained the pardon of his sin. Hence he humbled himself before his God, and cried for mercy.

Nor shall we restrain prayer before God, if we will but consider the state of an unpardoned soul.

No words can fully express the misery of one who has all the guilt of his sins upon him!

He has no peace with God, seeing that "God is angry with him every day," and "the wrath of God abides on him."

He has no peace in his own conscience; for though he may drown reflection for a while in business or pleasure, he is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but casts up mire and dirt! [Isaiah 57:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20).

He is also destitute of any well-founded hope for Heaven; he may buoy up himself with blind presumption; but he will feel many misgiving fears, and forebodings of evil.

He has no comfort in his afflictions; for, not having God for his friend, he cannot go to him with confidence, or obtain those refreshing consolations which strengthen and uphold the godly.

In a dying hour he is yet more wretched; if he is not insensible as a beast, how does he regret his mis-spent hours, and wish that God would prolong his state of probation!

But in the eternal world his misery is completed; he comes to the tribunal of divine justice without any mediator to reconcile him to God, or any advocate to plead his cause. Yes, the very voice which just before importuned him to accept of mercy, now bids him "depart accursed" and from that moment his doom is fixed in everlasting burnings!

Now can any man reflect on this, and not see the need of crying earnestly for mercy? Can our petitions be too earnest, or too constant, when they are the appointed, and the only means of escaping all this misery?

But in our application for mercy, we must be careful to use,

III. David's **Plea**.

The Psalmist derived all his hope of mercy from God himself.

He never pleaded the smallness of his offences or the multitude of his services, the depth of his penitence, or the fervor of his petitions. He knew that name, which had long before been proclaimed to Moses, to which, as to "a strong tower, the righteous runs and is safe;" and to that he fled for refuge; from that he derived his only hope, his only plea.

Nor can we present any other plea than the name—the sacred name of Jesus.

Under the Gospel we are taught more clearly to ask in the name of Jesus, and are assured that petitions so offered shall never fail of acceptance, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14). But it is no easy matter to offer that plea in sincerity. Perhaps there is nothing in the world more difficult. We naturally prefer any other plea that can be devised; and, even when we find that we have not in ourselves any worthiness on which we can rely, we are still averse to rest on the name of Jesus. We either deem it insufficient to procure acceptance for our prayers, or make our unworthiness a reason for declining to urge it as our plea with any confidence before God. But, unless we renounce every other hope, and rest entirely on the mediation and intercession of Christ—our prayer will never enter into the ears of our heavenly Father.

Observations.

1. The vilest of sinners has no reason to despair.

The confession, petition, and plea, which David presented at the throne of Grace—are suited to the very chief of sinners. Nor, as the subsequent experience of David proves, can there be any state in which they shall not prevail. Let none then despond. Be it so, our sins are great; but are they greater than Christ's merits, or beyond the reach of God's mercy? If not, let us exalt our adorable Savior; and determine, if we perish, to perish crying for mercy in the name of Jesus!

2. The most eminent saints have no ground to boast.

There never was a creature that had any righteousness of his own to plead. And if God has had mercy upon any, it was purely and entirely for his own name's sake, [Ezekiel 36:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.22); [Ezekiel 36:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.32). Could we ascend to Heaven, and ask the glorified saints what had been the ground of their acceptance, they would all "cast down their crowns at the feet of Jesus," and shout, with one consent, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb! [Revelation 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 4.10); [Revelation 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.10)." Let the saints on earth then lie low before God, and say continually, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise!"

3. People of every description must guard diligently against pride and unbelief.

Sin, of whatever kind, is both evil in itself and dangerous to us. But the consequences of pride and unbelief are peculiarly fatal. There is not any other sin which may not be forgiven, provided we seek mercy with real penitence and faith. But if we are too proud to confess our sins, and to plead the name and merits of Jesus for the forgiveness of them—then we insure and seal our own condemnation. Let us then guard against all sins; but especially against sins which rivet all our other sins upon us. So shall we obtain favor with God, and "be to him for a name and for a praise for evermore! [Jeremiah 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.11)."

#534

THE PORTION OF THOSE WHO FEAR GOD

**[Psalm 25:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.12-13)**

"Who is the man that fears the LORD? He shall teach him in the way He chooses. His soul shall dwell at ease, and his descendants shall inherit the earth."

Where, as in the Psalm before us, different verses begin with the different letters of the Hebrew alphabet, we must not look for a very strict connection between the different parts; if there is somewhat of a harmonious sentiment pervading the whole, it is as much as we have reason to expect.

The general idea that pervades this Psalm seems to be, that if (whether under the pressure of guilt or of affliction of any kind) we betake ourselves to God in prayer, and cast our care on him—then he will administer to us such consolation and support as our necessities may require. In conformity with this idea, he, throughout the former part of the Psalm, supplicates mercy for himself, and, in the words before us, he declares the blessedness of all who truly fear God.

To bring the subject more fully before you, I shall:

I. Inquire after the character that is here described.

Where shall we find a man who fears the Lord? One would suppose that, in a Christian community at least, it should be difficult to find one who did not fear God; but, strange as it may appear, the character here described is by no means common. I am anxious, however, to find a God-fearing man; because it is to him, and to him alone, that the glorious promises in my text are addressed. Assist me, then, every one of you, in this important inquiry; and descend into your own bosoms, to explore the records of conscience, and to see whether you can, in your own hearts, present before me the character I am endeavoring to find. I want to know "What man among you fears the Lord?"

1. Who is there among you that **reverences God's authority**?

There can be no question whether God's authority should be revered; for we all acknowledge him to be the Governor of the Universe, and confess that all his creatures owe submission to his will. Indeed it is the common sentiment of all, that "he is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence by all;" and it is obvious, that any man who disregards his authority can have no true fear of him in his heart.

2. Who is there among you that **dreads God's displeasure**?

We all are sinners, and, as sinners, are liable to the displeasure of the Most High. Whether our lives have been more or less moral, we are all transgressors of God's holy law, and all have merited his wrathful indignation; all, therefore, ought, with deep humility of mind, to fear his impending judgments. Had we never sinned, we should never have needed this kind of fear; but to fallen creatures it is absolutely and indispensably necessary.

Let me then ask: Who is there among you that mourns over his past transgressions, and implores mercy at the hands of his offended God, and seeks reconciliation with him through the Son of his love? I do not ask: Where is the person who, on some particular occasion, has wept for sin? but, Where is the person whose heart is habitually broken and contrite, so as to have no hope, no peace, but in the sin-atoning blood of Christ; and who, notwithstanding God is reconciled towards him, still loathes himself for his iniquities and abominations?

The man who had fled to a city of refuge ventured not out of the gates of the city any more (until the death of the High Priest), lest the pursuer of blood should fall upon him and destroy him. And if we, through fear of God's displeasure, have fled for refuge to Jesus, as to the hope set before us—we shall be careful to "abide in him," lest the sword of vengeance overtake us, and we perish.

3. Who is there among you that sincerely and unreservedly **endeavors to obey God's will**?

A desire to please God cannot but be associated with a fear of his Divine Majesty. Say, then, where is the person who from day to day endeavors to ascertain his will, and labors to perform it? I am not inquiring after one who never errs; for such a character as that I could have no hope to find on earth; since "in many things we all offend;" and "there is no man that lives and never sins." But one who labors conscientiously to approve himself to God, I may hope to find.

Search among you, brethren; see whether such a one be not to be found. I am not willing that the consolations in my text should be spoken in vain. I want to engage the attention of the person to whom they are addressed, and to pour them into the ear for which they are more especially designed. But do not too hastily obtrude yourselves, and say, 'I am the one who fears God.'

Consider once more. Are you so studious of God's will, and so determined to perform it, that no consideration of ease, or interest, or pleasure, can induce you to violate anyone of his commands? And, if in anything a more perfect way can be pointed out to you—are you ready to walk in it, notwithstanding any difficulties you may have to encounter, or any trials to which you may be exposed?

If there is one whose conscience bears witness to him that his state before God is such as I have described, then I have found the person for whose comfort the Psalmist made the declarations in my text, and for whose benefit I shall:

II. Unfold the benefits that are accorded to him.

Stand forth, my brother; for in the name of the Most High God I declare unto you, that:

1. You shall be taught and guided in the way that God approves.

It may be, that at present your views of divine truth are but obscure; and that you have but little capacity to comprehend the deep things of God, and but little opportunity to investigate them. Yet I say to you, in the name of the Lord, that you shall be guided into all truth, as far as shall be necessary for the welfare of your soul; and that God's way shall be made so plain before your face, that, notwithstanding you are "a wayfaring man, and, in respect of human sciences, a fool—you shall not err therein, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8)."

In particular, you shall have the Lord Jesus Christ revealed to you, as "the way, the truth, and the life;" and, "having received him" into your hearts, you shall "walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7)."

This is the very first step to which the teaching of Almighty God will lead you; as our Lord has said, "It is written in the prophets: All your children shall be taught of God. Every one, therefore, who has heard and learned of the Father, comes unto me, [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45)."

In the course of your pilgrimage many difficulties will arise, wherein you will need direction from above; but God engages that in all those emergencies, "you shall hear a voice behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it; when you would otherwise be turning to the right hand or to the left, [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)." As the pillar and the cloud went before the Israelites throughout all their journeyings in the wilderness for forty years, until they arrived safe in the Promised Land—so will "God guide you by his counsel, until he has safely brought you to glory! [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24)."

2. "Your soul shall dwell at ease".

It may be that your former iniquities have been great and manifold; so that, unless God interposed in a more than ordinary way to support your soul, you would sink into despair. But "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound;" and he will say to you, as to the woman of old, "Your sins are forgiven!" "Being justified by faith, you shall have peace with God;" and in your own conscience, even that "peace of God which passes all understanding." It is possible, also, that you may be exposed to many trials and temptations, even such as without divine aid would utterly overwhelm you. But you shall "know in whom you have believed; and feel assured that He is able to keep that which you have committed to him, 2 Timothy 1:12," and that "He will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom."

Thus, as Peter, the very night before his intended execution, though bound with chains, and doomed to a cruel death, was sleeping as serenely as if no such event had awaited him—so shall "your soul dwell at ease," yes, "it shall be kept in perfect peace, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3);" for, "if God gives quietness, then who can make trouble?" [Job 34:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.29).

But, in the margin of our Bibles the sense of the original is more fully and literally expressed thus, "His soul shall lodge in goodness." What a rich and glorious idea is this! The Scriptures abound in expressions of this kind; Isaiah, commending the truths of the Gospel to us, says, "Eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness;" and David says, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, while my mouth praises you with joyful lips."

Just so, in my text he tells us that the believer's soul shall "lodge in goodness." Yes, truly, "God himself is the habitation" of those who fear him; his bosom is the place in which they are safely lodged, far beyond the reach of harm! [Psalm 91:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.1); [Psalm 91:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-10), and fondled with more than maternal tenderness, [Isaiah 66:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.10-13); insomuch that God himself "rejoices over them to do them good, and rests in his love, and rejoices over them with singing, [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17)."

Thus, my brother (for I am speaking to that particular individual who fears God), it shall be with you in this world; and who shall describe your lodging in the world above? Oh! the joys that await you there! How surpassing all expression or conception! The kingdom, the glory, the felicity of God himself shall be yours, even your portion, and your inheritance, forever and ever.

APPLICATION.

Now will I pause; and, from addressing you who fear God, turn,

1. To the unhappy multitude who do not fear God.

It is painful to make this distinction; but this distinction must be made. We are commanded to "separate the precious from the vile, [Jeremiah 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.19);" and if we forbear to do it, God will not; He will put "a difference between those who serve him, and those who do not serve him, [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18)."

It cannot but be known to you, that the generality, even of the Christian world, have not, in truth, "the fear of God before their eyes." Say, beloved, did not your own consciences attest, that, in many of you at least, the marks of holy fear did not exist; or, not in such a degree as to identify you with the character described in my text?

While we spoke of those who reverenced the authority of God, and trembled at his displeasure, and made it the one object of their lives to do his will—were not many of you constrained to say, "If this be the character of those who fear God, I am forced to confess that it does not belong to me?" Then, brethren, by your own confession, you have no part in the promises annexed to that character. And, indeed, your own experience confirms this; for at this moment you cannot comprehend those mysteries of grace which are made clear to the believing soul. You have not that spiritual discernment, whereby alone you can understand and appreciate the things of the Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.12); [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14).

And, as for "your soul dwelling at ease," you know nothing of it; the very thought of death and judgment is so appalling to you, that you can find no rest until you dismiss it from your mind. God himself tells us, that "you are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; and that there is no peace to the wicked! [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21)."

Will you not, then, seek to fear God? Will you not entreat him to "put his fear into your hearts," before it is too late? I tremble at the thought of the lodging prepared for you. Oh! "who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" I beg you, brethren, realize in your minds the different states of the Rich Man and Lazarus; and "labor not for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you."

2. To anyone who, though really fearing God, does not yet experience the full comfort of it in his soul.

It may be that such a one is here present, even one who, because he feels not yet all the consolations of true religion, is led to doubt its existence in his soul. We read of some in the primitive Church, who were "in heaviness through manifold temptations;" and, no doubt, there may be people so circumstanced among ourselves at this time.

But for such God has provided peculiar encouragement. He has stated the very case, and addressed appropriate counsel to the person under it, "Who is among you that fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10)."

Do not imagine that God has forgotten his Word, or that he will not fulfill it to you; for "not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fail." "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." The grain that is sown in the earth does not rise up immediately; nor must you be discouraged, if you have some time to wait before the harvest that is prepared for you appears. "The vision may tarry; but it is only for the time appointed of your God; and then it shall come, and shall not tarry, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)." Only wait his leisure; and you shall find in due season, that, "in every nation under Heaven, he who fears God and works righteousness shall be accepted by him!"

#535

THE SECRETS OF THE LORD

**[Psalm 25:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.14)**

"The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him; and he will show them his covenant."

Of the condescension of God, mankind in general form very inadequate conceptions. His greatness is supposed to be such as not to admit of an attention to the trifling concerns of men; and because we stand at an infinite distance from him, the idea of familiar approximation to him is contemplated only as a fanatical and wild conceit. But God represents himself to us as a Father; and our blessed Lord says, "Henceforth I do not call you servants; for the servant knows not what his Lord does; but I have called you friends! [John 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.15)."

Now the Lord Jesus Christ was from eternity "in the bosom of the Father, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18)," and knows the Father as intimately and completely as the Father knows him, [John 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.15). [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27); and all the Father's secrets he has made known to us [John 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.15); so that we are treated by him, not with the reserve that is shown to strangers, but with the confidence that is due to people who are bound to him in the ties of the most endeared friendship.

Under the Mosaic dispensation this holy familiarity indeed was but little known. The whole economy was of a servile nature; none except the high priest having any immediate access to God; nor he, except on one day in the year; and then not without the blood of sacrifices. Yet, even under that dispensation, some were more highly favored with divine communications; insomuch that Solomon could say, "The secret of the Lord is with the righteous, [Proverbs 3:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.32)." Under the government of the Lord Jesus Christ, the legal distinctions are removed; and all true Christians possess the same privileges as the most favored of God's servants; so that now it may be said, in reference to them all, without exception, "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant."

In confirmation of this truth, I will endeavor to point out:

I. Some of those **secrets**which God reveals to his faithful people.

The whole of the divine life is a secret, from the beginning to the end; and "the joys" arising from it are such as the unbeliever cannot understand. But, to descend to particulars,

1. God gives them an insight into the great mystery of redemption.

This was "a mystery hidden from ages and generations," yes, "hidden in God from the foundation of the world, [Romans 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.25). [Ephesians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.5);" but at last it was made known to the Church by Christ and his holy Apostles, that all God's saints might become acquainted with it, [Ephesians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.9). [Colossians 1:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.26-27). Paul, speaking of the great truths of the Gospel, says, "It is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit! [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10)."

We must not, however, imagine, that because this mystery is revealed to the Church in the written word, we need no further revelation of it to our souls; for "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Notwithstanding, therefore, the Gospel revelation is so clear in itself, we still must "receive the Spirit of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God, [1 Corinthians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.12); 1 Corinthians 2:14."

A speculative knowledge of the Gospel may, indeed, be acquired by human instruction; but a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with it, as "the wisdom of God and the power of God," can be attained only through the teaching of God's Spirit, "flesh and blood cannot reveal it unto us;" it can be made known only by the Father's revealing of it, [Matthew 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.17). And that revealing, blessed be his name, is given to many. Through his tender mercy, it may be said of many, "You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things! [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27)."

While to some, who hear the Gospel, "it is spoken, as it were, only in parables;" so that, in relation to the plainest truths of the Gospel, they are ready to exclaim, as Ezekiel's hearers did in reference to him, "Ah, Lord God! does he not speak parables! [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.49)." To others "it is granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, [Mark 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.11);" and by the opening of their spiritual eyes "they are brought out of darkness into marvelous light."

2. He makes them to know their own personal interest in Christ's redemption.

We are struck with the confidence with which the inspired writers speak, in reference to their own state and the state of their brethren in the faith,  
"Now are we the sons of God."  
"We know that we have passed from death unto life."  
"We know that God abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us."  
"We know that we are of God; and the whole world lies in wickedness."  
[1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2); [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14); [1 John 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.24); [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19).

Now this assurance is no other than what our blessed Lord promised to his believing people, "In that day you shall know that the Father is in me, and I in you, and you in me, [John 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.20)." That the believer may, by fair and rational deduction, ascertain much of his state before God—there can be no doubt but that internal manifestations are, in many cases, given to the soul, is also certain; for our Lord has promised, that "he will manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world;" and this promise he has explained, by saying, that "he and his Father will love us, and come unto us, and make their abode with us! [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23)."

Accordingly we find, that to many is given "the Holy Spirit," as a witness, to "bear witness with their spirit that they are the children of God," and, as "a Spirit of adoption, enabling them, with holy confidence, to cry, Abba, Father! [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-16)." They have prayed to him, like the Psalmist, "Say unto my soul, I am your salvation, [Psalm 35:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.3);" and God has answered them in the desire of their hearts, and enabled them to say, in reference to him, "O God, you are my God! [Psalm 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1)." And, in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his! Song of Solomon 2:16."

3. He shows them that every event, of whatever kind, is in some way or other working for the ultimate salvation of their souls.

They may not always see this at first; but, when more fully instructed, they learn to trust in God, assured, that though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne."

See a remarkable instance of this in the Apostle Paul. He was shut up for two full years in prison, and was thus deprived of exercising his apostolic office in his accustomed way. Such an event as this would be contemplated, by the Church at large, as a subject of unmixed sorrow. But Paul himself had far different views of it; he said, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation;" nor was he less confident that good would accrue from it, also, to the Church of God; yes, he saw, even while in bonds, the beneficial results of his imprisonment; and declared, that, instead of obstructing the progress of the Gospel, it had "tended rather to the furtherance of the Gospel," since many had been emboldened by it to preach the Word with greater courage and fidelity! [Philippians 1:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12-14); [Philippians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.19).

Thus does God compose the minds of all his faithful people. They may indeed, for a season, be ready to complain with Jacob, "All these things are against me!" But he whispers in their ears, that "All things are working together for their good! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28);" and that, eventually, they shall have as much reason to bless him for the darkest dispensations as for those which were more gratifying to flesh and blood.

Passing by many other secrets, I will proceed to set before you:

II. That more particular view of God's covenant which is the crown and summit of them all.

From all eternity God entered into covenant with his Son; as it is said, "The counsel of peace was between them both, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13)."

1. To this covenant God leads the minds of his people, as the **source** of all their blessings.

Certain it is, that, whatever grace has been bestowed upon us, it has been conferred, "not on account of any works of righteousness which we have done, but according to God's purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)." But this is a great secret; a secret utterly unknown to the world at large; and one which not all, even of godly people, are able to receive. There is, in the minds of many, a prejudice against it, as though such an idea would necessarily puff up the mind with pride and conceit. But in truth, there is nothing in the world that so much tends to humble and abase the soul as this; for it takes from man all ground of self-preference, and leads him to give all the honor of his salvation to God alone!

Believer, how wonderful is the thought, that God, from all eternity, set his heart on you; ordained you to be born in a country where the light of Scripture shone, and where the means and opportunities of conversion should be afforded to you! How wonderful, too, that this grace, which so many receive in vain, should be made effectual for you; and that, by the operation of God's mighty power on your soul, you should be "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God!" Are you not amazed, that you should be "taken, when so many are left;" and that the Savior, who to so many millions is only "a stumbling-block and rock of offence—should be to you a sanctuary," where you have found rest for your soul? Truly, it is a great matter if God has taught you, that "you have not chosen him—but he has chosen you, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16);" that you have not loved him, or apprehended him—but you have been loved and apprehended by him! 1 [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10). [Galatians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.9). [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12); that "He has loved you with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn you! [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3)." Does not the thought of this overwhelm your soul with gratitude? Are you not altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise?

2. To this covenant God leads the minds of his people, as the **security** for the everlasting continuance of their blessings.

This is another part of the same stupendous mystery; and blessed, indeed, are the ears that have heard this secret from the Lord, and the eyes that can discern the truth of it!

Believer, when God entered into covenant with his Son, he left it not uncertain whether any benefit should accrue from his mediation, but engaged, that "when he should make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand."

Then he gave you to his Son, that in you "he might see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied."

You were then ordained to be a jewel in his crown; and the Father engaged, when he put you into the hands of his Son, that "none should ever pluck you from them, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)." Times without number does the Lord Jesus speak of his people in this light, as "given to him from eternity by the Father! [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2); [John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6); [John 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.9); [John 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.11-12); [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24);" and "of those who were so given him, he will lose none! [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12)."

What a consolation is this to you, under all your difficulties and all your conflicts—to know that "God has made with you an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure! [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)." God himself tells us, that "he confirmed his covenant with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)."

Rejoice, then, in this thought. Bless God for making it known to you. See how safe you are in the hands of an unchanging God. See to what it is owing that you have not been consumed already, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6); and what is your security, against all the wiles of Satan, and all the infirmities of flesh and blood. "Know, then, in whom you have believed; and that, as he is able to keep that which you have committed to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)," so "he will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom! [2 Timothy 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.18)."

To **improve** this subject, I would further say:

1. Cultivate increasing friendship with God.

It is not to all, but to his friends only, that God imparts these heart-reviving secrets, even to those who truly "fear him." Nor is it amidst the noise and bustle of the world that he will communicate them, but in seasons of retirement, and in the stillness of the night. It is by a still small voice that he imparts them to the sold. O let your fellowship with him be sweet and frequent! Go to him on all occasions; consult him in every emergency; listen to his voice, whether he speaks by the written word, or by his Holy Spirit. Say to him at all times, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." So "will he draw near to you, when you draw near to him;" and when you spread before him your inmost needs, "he will guide you by his counsel;" he will "lead you into all truth;" he will make known to you "the deep things of God, [1 Corinthians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.10);" and by communications of every kind will "perfect that which concerns you, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8);" enabling you to "comprehend, in a measure, what none can fully comprehend: the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ, and thereby filling you with all the fullness of God! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

2. Make a due improvement of the secrets which God has already imparted to you.

Treasure them up in your minds, for your support and comfort under all the trials of life. They will prove a healing balm to every wound. Like an anchor of the soul, they will keep you steadfast amidst all the storms that you may encounter in this tempestuous world! [Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19).

But, keep them not altogether in your own bosoms. God may make use of you for the imparting of them to others, and for the sustaining and strengthening of your weaker brethren.

Yet, care is necessary, that you do not, by an indiscreet disclosure of them to those whose minds are not prepared to receive them, lay a stumbling-block before the very people whom you wish to edify. Our Lord cautions us "not to cast our pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and tear us to pieces! [Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.6)." We must administer "milk to babes, and strong meat to only those who are able to digest it, [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.1-2). [Hebrews 5:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.12-14)."

But to those who have ears to hear, it is well to speak of these things, as our Lord and his Apostles conversed of them in the way to Emmaus. Then will your hearts often burn within you; and your own souls, as well as those of your brethren, be edified in faith and love!

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THE WORSHIP OF GOD DELIGHTFUL

**[Psalm 26:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.8)**

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells."

Between the people of God and the men of this world, there is a much broader line of distinction than is generally imagined. In the performance of outward duties there may be but little difference; but in their motives and principles and desires, they are as far asunder as Heaven and earth; yes, I had almost said, as between Heaven and Hell!

They have altogether a different taste; the one desiring heavenly things as their most delightful occupation; while the other follow them rather by constraint, and feel themselves most in their element when they are engaged in worldly company and in carnal pursuits.

The faithful servant of God enjoys the testimony of his own conscience, that he has no real delight in anything but in doing God's will, and in enjoying his presence. David, in this respect, may serve as a looking-glass, wherein every real saint may discern his own image. He could appeal to God that he had found no pleasure in worldly company and worldly pursuits; but that his delight had been altogether in communion with his God, and in the ordinances of his grace, verse 2-5.

In order to make a suitable improvement of the assertion before us, I will show,

I. The reasons which David had for so loving the house of God.

To give a full account of them would be impossible. It may suffice to specify a few of those which operated with greater force upon his mind.

1. It was the immediate residence of God.

"I have loved," says he, "the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells." When Moses made the tabernacle, it pleased God to come down and honor it with his more immediate presence, and to manifest his glory there in the sight of all Israel, [Exodus 40:34-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 40.34-38). There God promised, in a more especial manner, to meet his people; saying, "You shall put the mercy-seat above upon the ark; and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you; and there I will meet with you; and I will commune with you from above the mercy-seat, and from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment unto the children of Israel, [Exodus 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.21-22)."

The same blessed privilege was given to all Israel, through the medium of their High Priest, as long as the tabernacle and the temple stood; and on numberless occasions had David reaped the benefit of this condescending and merciful appointment.

Can we wonder, then, that he should love the house of God, where he enjoyed so vast a privilege, and where such transcendent benefits were accorded to him? But we know from himself what his feelings were in relation to it, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple, [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4)."

2. There David was enabled to worship God in the way that God himself had appointed.

Though God might be worshiped acceptably in every place—yet it was at the tabernacle alone that any sacrifice could be offered to him, or that a full access to him could be enjoyed. There alone could a sinner be sprinkled with the blood of his offering, and have the pardon of his sins thus sealed upon his soul. Hence, when David was driven from Jerusalem, and forced to take refuge in a heathen land, this was the great subject of his distress; not, that he was separated from his friends, but that he was cut off from communion with his God in the established ordinances of his worship. Hear his sad distress, "As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so my soul pants after you, O God! My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night; while they continually say unto me, Where is your God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me; for I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day …. As with a sword in my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say daily unto me, Where is your God? [Psalm 41:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.1-4); [Psalm 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.10)."

3. There David obtained those supplies of grace and peace which his daily necessities required.

The whole book of Psalms is little else than a record of answers to his prayers. "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God! [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3)." True, he might enjoy much of this in his own secret chamber; but it was chiefly in the house of God that he obtained these benefits. This he himself acknowledges; and he assigns it as the reason for his ardent attachment to that holy place, "How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord Almighty! My soul longs, yes, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Yes, the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; even your altars, O Lord Almighty, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in your house; they will be still praising you …. A day in your courts is better than a thousand; I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly! [Psalm 84:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.1-4); [Psalm 84:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10-11)."

The example before us might be amply sufficient to commend the house of God to our regard. But I must proceed to state:

II. The incomparably stronger reasons which **we**have for a similar desire for God's ordinances.

The dispensation which we are privileged to enjoy is of a more liberal kind than that under which David lived.

1. Our **access to God** is more intimate.

David, though a prophet and a king, did not dare to enter into the most holy place, where God displayed his glory. Had he presumed to intrude himself there, he would have been struck dead upon the spot. Not even the high-priest could enter there but on one day in the year, and in the manner prescribed by God himself.

But we are permitted to come even to his very throne of grace, and to behold him on his mercy seat! Yes, the veil of the temple, at the time of our Savior's death, was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and from that very moment a way of access to him has been open for all the sinners of mankind, without exception.

This is the construction put on that event by an inspired Apostle, who says, "Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having a High-Priest over the house of God—let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith! [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22)." "The Holy Spirit himself," I say, has taught us this in [Hebrews 9:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7-8). And is this no ground for love to divine ordinances? Methinks, the liberty thus accorded to us should produce in us a correspondent liberty of mind in approaching God, and an exquisite delight in drawing near unto him.

2. Our **views of God** are more clear.

Even the high-priest himself, when admitted into the sanctuary, could behold nothing but a bright cloud abiding on the ark between the cherubim.

But we have access to the true tabernacle, the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily! [Colossians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.19)." "He is the image of the invisible God, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15)," "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3);" and "in beholding him, we behold the Father himself, [John 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.9);" yes, "as with an unveiled face we behold the glory" both of the Father and the Son! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). We see "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, [2 Corinthians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.19)," and are enabled to call him our Father and our Friend, [Galatians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.6).

Of the attributes of God, also, we have incomparably clearer views than ever were given even to David himself. True indeed, he says that in God, "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other, [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)." But David had not such an insight into that mystery as we enjoy. The full discovery of God, as "a just God, and yet a justifier of ungodly men! [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26)," was reserved for us, under the Gospel dispensation; we see, not only mercy, but faithfulness and justice, engaged on our side, and pledged for the forgiveness of our sins, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9).

His purposes, too, how marvelously are they unraveled, and with what distinctness are they exhibited to our admiring eyes! Things which no eye ever saw, or ear heard, or heart conceived, under the Jewish economy—are revealed unto us by the Spirit; so that, from eternity to eternity, we can behold the designs of God unfolded:  
first, as they were originally concerted between the Father and the Son in eternity past;  
then as executed by Christ Jesus in his incarnate and glorified state;  
and, lastly, as they will be consummated at the day of judgment.

Say, then, whether we should not delight in drawing near to God, and having our souls filled with these heavenly contemplations? If the shadow of these things so endeared the house of God to David—then what should the substance of them effect in our hearts?

3. Our **communications from God** are more abundant.

Doubtless David was most highly favored by the Lord; and "God was very abundant towards him, both in faith and love, [1 Timothy 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.14)." But still we cannot yield to him, no, not even to him, in the privileges we enjoy. The Holy Spirit was not then "poured out so abundantly" as he has since been upon the servants of the Lord, [John 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.39). [Titus 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.6). To us he is given as "a Spirit of adoption, [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15)," and as "a witness" to testify of that adoption, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16); and as "a seal," to mark us for the Lord's peculiar treasure, [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14). The servile spirit of the Law is altogether banished from us, and we are "made free indeed, [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36)."

With what exalted views are we sometimes favored, when we behold the Lord Jesus Christ:  
actually bearing our sins in his own body on the tree,  
and pleading our cause at the right hand of God,  
and ordering everything, both in Heaven and earth, for our welfare,  
and preparing a mansion in Heaven for us, himself taking possession of it for us as our forerunner,  
and shortly about to come again in his own person to invest us with all the glory he has purchased for us, even a participation of his own throne, his own kingdom, and his own glory!

What is all this, but "a pledge" of Heaven itself already begun in the soul!

Yet all this is given to us frequently under the ministry of the Word, and at the table of the Lord; insomuch that we seem caught up, as it were, into the third heavens, and scarcely know whether we are in the body or out the body, by reason of the brightness of our views, and the blessedness of our souls.

I do not mean to say that this is the experience of all, nor of any at all times; but I do say, that it is the privilege of all; and that it is our own fault if we do not actually possess it; and that the hope of gratifying our taste with these rich dainties cannot fail of endearing to us the house where this feast is provided for us! [Isaiah 25:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6-8).

It will now, in **conclusion**, be profitable to inquire,

1. Why it is that this experience is so rare.

It must be confessed that there are but few who thus delight in the ordinances of God. But why is this? Would they not be alike precious to all, if all desired to make a suitable improvement of them? The truth is, that the generality of people attend them only as a mere form, without any consciousness of the ends for which they have been appointed. What if we viewed them as our mother's bosom, to which we as babes were invited for the nourishment of our souls? What if we came to them, "desiring the sincere and unadulterated milk of the word, that we might grow thereby! [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2)." Truly we would then find such communications from the Lord Jesus, as would fill us with unutterable joy! [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10); [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38).

But we do not feel our need of mercy;  
we have no genuine desire after the Savior;  
we are content with a religion which consists in mere form, without any power.

No wonder, then, that the house of God has no charms for us. True, indeed, people may desire divine house, just as they would a fine concert, on account of the eloquence of the person by whom they are administered, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32). Or they may set a value on them as means of fostering a pride of their own goodness, [Isaiah 58:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.2). But as means of access to God, and as a medium of communion with him, they find no real delight in them. To enter into the experience of David, and obtain a conformity of mind to his vital religion, must be our one great and paramount concern. If once Christ becomes our supreme joy, whatever brings us near to him, and him near to us—will be "as marrow and fatness to our souls!"

2. What are the prospects of those in whom this godly experience is found.

Truly, the godly are most blessed among men. They need not envy any other people upon earth. They possess what is far superior to all the delights of sense.

View a man at the footstool of the Most High; view even the poor publican, who, through a consciousness of his own extreme unworthiness, dared not so much as to lift up his eyes to Heaven. Who that knows with what delight Almighty God beheld him, and with what pleasure he listened to his sighs, and treasured up his tears in his vial—would not think the state of his soul, and the prospects of Heaven that were before him, to be truly blessed?

The truth is, that every such person has "his sins put away from him, as far as the east is from the west;" and "his name is written in the Lamb's book of life!" For every such person is prepared "a crown of glory, that never fades away."

He now beholds his God by faith; and soon shall he behold him face to face.

He now draws near to God in a temple made with hands; and he shall soon commune with him in his glorious temple above!

He now pours forth his prayers and praises at such intervals as the infirmity of his nature will admit of; and he soon shall engage in praising God, without infirmity or interruption, to all eternity!

#537

DAVID'S LOVE TO GOD'S ORDINANCES

**[Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4)**

"One thing I have desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

Most of the saints recorded in the Holy Scriptures were eminent for some particular grace:

in Abraham, faith was chiefly conspicuous;  
in Job, patience;  
in Moses, meekness;  
in Elijah, faithfulness and fearlessness.  
In respect of devotion, David seems to have surpassed all others.

Of none have we such ample and minute accounts, in relation to this matter, as we have of him.

His public addresses to God,  
his private communion with him,  
the inmost recesses of his heart when in his closet or upon his bed—  
are all laid open to us.

On this account the Psalms are pre-eminently useful to all who wish to cultivate a devout spirit, and to maintain a close walk with God. The expression before us may serve as a specimen of the whole.

In discoursing upon it: I will:

I. I will set before you the **example** of David.

The one object of David's desire was to enjoy the ordinances of his God.

David was not of the tribe to which the priesthood exclusively belonged; yet would he gladly have possessed the privilege of the priests, in having his stated residence as near as possible to the tabernacle of his God. But though this could not be, he determined, by the constancy of his attendance there, to make it, as it were, his residence and habitation. This indeed was "the one object of his desire;" and in comparison with it there was nothing in the world that he wished for. To this he made everything subservient; even the affairs of state were not allowed so to occupy his mind as to divert his attention from the service of the sanctuary. This one object he sought, and "determined to seek it" "to the last hour of his life." He "sought it of the Lord" too, entreating him so to order and overrule everything, that he might not be forced away from Jerusalem, or, while there, be kept away from the ordinances of his God.

If at any time he was, by the efforts of his enemies, prevented from waiting upon God, he mourned over it, and "panted after the return of those blessed seasons, even as the hunted deer pants after the water-brooks! [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2)." On some occasions, his enemies, knowing how painful to him his absence from the tabernacle was, exulted over him, and said, "Where is now your God?" And so distressing to him were these impious taunts, that "tears were his food night and day on account of them, [Psalm 42:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.3)," and they were even "as a sword in his bones, [Psalm 42:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.10)."

At those seasons he envied the swallows, that were able to build their nests in the courts of God's house; he envied them, I say, their proximity to the altar of his God, [Psalm 84:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.1-4). Every day that was spent at a distance from that, seemed, as it were, to be lost to his life; so entirely was his soul wrapped up in the enjoyment of divine ordinances, and in cultivating communion with his God.

David's desire was founded on the benefit he had derived from them.

There "he beheld the beauty of the Lord;" and there "he inquired of the Lord," spreading before him, from day to day, his every want, his every wish. He looked through the various sacrifices that were offered there from day to day—and beheld in them the perfections of his God.

In the death of all the victims, he saw the desert of sin, and the justice of God—which had denounced death as the punishment of sin.

In the acceptance of those sacrifices he saw the goodness and mercy of God, who had appointed such offerings as means of leading the people to that Great Sacrifice, which would in due time be offered for the sins of men.

In the sprinklings and ablutions that were practiced, he beheld the holiness of God, who would accept no sinner who would not be purged from his iniquities, and be made holy after the divine image.

In the whole of the services altogether he saw "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissing each other! [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)."

Here he felt encouragement to pour out his soul before God, and to ask whatever his returning necessities might require. This, to him whose trials were so great and manifold, was an unspeakable privilege. The extreme arduousness of his affairs also rendered it most desirable to him to spread all his difficulties before the Lord, and to ask counsel of him for his direction. It was true that in private he could carry his affairs to the Lord, and implore help from him; but, as the public ordinances were of God's special appointment, and as the high-priest was the established medium of access to him, and of communications from him—he delighted more particularly to wait upon God there; so that while he received blessings in a more abundant measure from God, he might glorify God in the sight of all Israel.

Admiring, as I do, this bright example,

II. I will commend David example to your **imitation**.

We have far greater reason to love the ordinances of God than ever David had.

If the beauty of the Lord was visible in the Jewish worship, how much more so must it be in the ordinances of the Gospel! David beheld the perfections of his God only under types and shadows; but we behold them reflected as in a looking-glass, with transcendent brightness, and all shining with united splendor in the face of Jesus Christ! We see, not bulls and goats, but the very Son of God himself, "Jehovah's fellow," offered in sacrifice for the sins of men. What then must the justice be that required such a sacrifice! What the love, that gave him from the Father's bosom to be a sacrifice! What the mercy, that spared not him, in order that we, enemies and rebels, might be spared!

So imperfectly was this mystery known under the Jewish dispensation, that all, even the most exalted prophets, were in a state of comparative darkness; but now, "the things which from the beginning of the world eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had it entered into the heart of man to conceive—are revealed unto us by the Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10);" so that we can truly and emphatically say, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shines, [1 John 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.8)."

John the Baptist was greater in this respect than all the prophets; because he personally saw and bore witness to Him, whom all the other prophets spoke of obscurely, and at the distance of many hundred years; but as great as John was, "the least and lowest in the Gospel kingdom is greater than he, [Matthew 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.11)." In our ordinances, Jesus Christ is so fully revealed, that he may be said to be "evidently set forth crucified before our eyes, [Galatians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.1);" and at his holy table we "eat his flesh, and drink his blood," as truly in a spiritual sense, as we do really and substantially eat the bread and drink the wine by which they are represented.

We see that through the virtue of this sacrifice God is so reconciled to us, as to "behold no iniquity in us, [Numbers 23:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.21);" for, viewing us as clothed in the righteousness of his dear Son, he beholds us "without spot or blemish! [Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27)." Moreover as by faith we see the Lord Jesus carrying his own blood within the veil—so we also hear him making intercession for us at the right hand of God; yes, and "out of the fullness that is treasured up in him, we receive" all the blessings that he has purchased for us!

How often are we, in the experience of these things, constrained to cry out with the prophet, "How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty! [Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.17)." And how often, in rapturous admiration of him, do we pray with the Psalmist, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!" In truth, it is by thus "beholding as with an unveiled face the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord! 2 Corinthians 3:18."

Nor do we have the less advantage of David in relation to the things which we would ask from God; for we are able to inquire more explicitly and distinctly of our God than he could. He indeed might say with Moses, "Lord, show me your glory;" and God would, as in the case of Moses, "make all his goodness to pass before him, [Exodus 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-19)." But audible sounds conveyed nothing to them, in comparison with what shall be disclosed to us by the still small voice of God's Holy Spirit, speaking in us through the written Word. To us all the blessings of the Covenant are laid open; and, as God, when he revealed them, said, "I will be inquired of concerning these things to do them, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37)." We are at liberty to take that covenant, and spread it before the Lord, and to ask of him every distinct blessing that is contained in it. We may lay hold on every promise that we can find in the inspired volume, and plead it with God, and have it fulfilled to our souls.

Besides, we can ask in the name of Jesus Christ; which none of the prophets ever could. And with what confidence can we do that, when we reflect on the relation which exists between the Father and the Son, and the express engagement which the Father has made to answer every petition which is offered in his Son's name, [John 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.23-24); Moreover, the particular promise of the Lord Jesus to be more immediately with his people in the public ordinances, and to grant whatever any number of his congregated people shall agree to ask, [Matthew 18:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.19-20), is a still further encouragement to us to frequent the house of God; for experience proves, that still, as formerly, "God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob, [Psalm 87:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.2)."

We should therefore desire the ordinances no less than David did.

We should make a point of attending on all stated occasions the ordinances of our God. We should not allow any trifling matter to detain us from them; and, if we are kept from them by any means, it should fill us with grief rather than delight; and we should determine as soon as possible to remove the obstacle that deprives us of so great a blessing.

More particularly, we should keep in mind what it is that we should go there to obtain; nor ever consider the true object of the ordinances as attained, unless we be enriched with brighter views of his beauty, and more enlarged discoveries of his excellency!

We should consider too, what our more immediate necessities require; so that we may be ready to spread them all before him, and to inquire of him respecting them. Then the more enlarged our expectations of benefit from the ordinances are, the more abundant will be God's communications of blessings to us by them. If we "open our mouths ever so wide, he will fill them! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)."

Application.

1. Love to God's ordinances is most conducive to your present happiness.

Hear the testimony of David himself, "Blessed is the man whom you chose, and causes to approach unto you, that he may dwell in your courts; he shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy temple, [Psalm 65:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.4)." And with this agrees the experience of every living saint.

Hence every true believer can say, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells, [Psalm 26:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.8)." Or rather, the more appropriate language of his heart is, "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you, in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water; to see your power and your glory, so as I have seen you in the sanctuary! [Psalm 63:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-2)."

I will leave you to judge, whether a person with such desires, and such enjoyments, is not happy. And if you are persuaded that he must be so, then seek your own happiness in this way, in which you cannot possibly be disappointed; for "he never said to any: Seek my face in vain."

2. Love to God's ordinances is the best preparative for Heaven.

Heaven is a place of continued exercises, for which we are now to be trained. We must now obtain a taste for heavenly employments; and in that taste real piety consists. We quite mistake if we imagine that religion consists in notions or in forms; it is a taste; a taste not formed by nature or education; but wrought in us by the Spirit of God; and the acquisition of this constitutes our fitness for Heaven.

What happiness could a soul that feels the exercises of devotion irksome; and in Heaven where the singing praises to God and to the Lamb forms the one employment of all around the throne, and will to all eternity?

If this is not the pleasure which you chiefly desire in this world—then be assured that you are not prepared to unite with saints and angels in the world to come!

If this is not your state, whatever knowledge you may possess, you are yet a lost soul; for God himself has said, that "those who are after the flesh, mind (savor) the things of the flesh; and those who are after the Spirit, desire the things of the Spirit, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5)."

I beg you then to seek your happiness in God; and never to rest until you can say, "Whom have I in Heaven but You? There is none upon earth that I desire besides You!"

#538

THE DUTY OF PRAYER

**[Psalm 27:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.8)**

When You said, "Seek My face."  
My heart said to You, "Your face, O LORD, I will seek."

Perhaps the thing which most strongly characterizes a child of God, than a spirit of prayer. The Lord's faithful servants are particularly designated as "a people near unto him, [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14);" while of the hypocrite it is pointedly asked, "Will he always call upon God? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? [Job 27:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.10)." The invitations of God are common to all; but the way in which they are received constitutes the difference between the child of this world and the child of God.

The words before us, while they describe the experience of David, will lead me to show,

I. In what light the invitations of God are, for the most part, regarded.

God is incessantly calling men to seek his face.

He does this by his Word; in which he bids us to look to him, and call upon him, and turn to him, and lay hold upon him; and sends his ministers to invite and beseech us in me name.

He does it, also, by his providence; all that he does for us in a way of mercy, is to stimulate us to love him; and his chastisements are to awaken us to our duty, saying, "Hear the rod, and him who has appointed it."

He does it, also, by his Spirit; for conscience is his voice within us, "his still small voice," whereby he whispers to us, and moves us, and "strives with us," and "draws us to himself."

The whole creation, the heavenly bodies moving in their orbits, "the elements that fulfill his will," the "birds which know their season," and the beasts which acknowledge their Benefactor; the occurrences of every day, even the most common and casual, as the going to a well for water, [John 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.7); [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10), or climbing up into a tree for the gratifying of curiosity, [Luke 19:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.4-5)—all subserve the same blessed end, to introduce us to the knowledge of his love, and to the enjoyment of his favor.

But God's invitations are almost universally "made light of".

Some treat them with contempt, "mocking his messengers, and despising his Words! [2 Chronicles 36:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.16)."

Others justify their refusal of them by a variety of excuses, like those in the parable, who "had bought a field, and must go and see it; and a yoke of oxen, which they must go to try; or had married a wife, and therefore could not come." Every person has his excuse:  
one is too old to change his ways;  
another is too young to engage in such serious concerns;  
another is too much occupied to be at liberty for such pursuits.

Others profess a willingness to obey the call, but never realize their intentions. They say, "I will go, Sir; but they never execute their Father's will, [Matthew 21:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.30);" they will, like Ezekiel's auditors, approve what they hear, but will never give themselves truly and unreservedly to God, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32).

Let us now proceed to show, on the contrary,

II. The light in which the invitations of God ought to be regarded.

David's example is precisely that which we should follow. There was in his bosom a chord in perfect unison with that which the finger of God had touched, and that vibrated to the touch. Thus, when God says to all the sinners of mankind, "Seek my face," there should be in every one of us a responding chord, in perfect harmony with the divine command; and we should, every one of us, reply, "Your face, Lord, will I seek." This duty we should execute,

1. We should seek God with a grateful sense of his condescension and grace.

How amazing is it that such a proposal should originate with God; and that Jehovah should "stand at the door of our hearts, and knock" there for admittance! If a permission only had been granted to us to seek his favor, methinks it should have been embraced with all imaginable earnestness; for sure enough, if such an imitation were sent to those who are now in Hell, it would not be treated with indifference there! But it is not a mere permission that we receive; it is a call, an invitation, an entreaty; and should we "make light of that?" No! We should turn unto our God with our whole hearts, and avail ourselves, without delay, of the opportunity that is thus afforded to us.

2. We should seek God with a ready acquiescence in his appointed way.

God tells us, that it is in Christ alone that he can accept us; and that we must come to him through Christ, pleading the merit of his blood, and relying altogether on his sin-atoning sacrifice. And shall this appear to us a hard saying? Shall this be deemed too humiliating for our proud hearts to submit to? Shall we not bless God, that he has given us a Savior who shall mediate between him and us, and, like "a Mediator, [Job 9:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.33)," lay his hand on both, in order to our reconciliation? Surely we should not hesitate a moment to humble ourselves before him, to acknowledge our desert of his wrathful indignation, and to implore his mercy in the name of his dear Son.

3. We should seek God with a determination of heart that nothing shall ever keep us from him.

Things there are, without number, which would keep us in bondage, and detain us from our God. But we should be on our guard against them all; and determine to break through every obstacle that the world, the flesh, and the devil, can place in our way!

For, what can the world do, either by its allurements or its terrors, to counter-balance the loss of God's favor?

As for the flesh, neither its weakness nor its corruptions should discourage us in our way to God.

Nor should the devil, with all his wiles and all his devices, be allowed to divert us from our purpose, or to retard us in our way.

We should have our hearts bent upon sincerely coming to Christ. Every object under Heaven should be subordinated to that. Other duties, doubtless, should be performed in their place; but to obtain God's favor should be our first concern; and life itself, in comparison with that, should be of no value in our eyes.

ADDRESS.

God calls you now, my brethren, by my voice; and says to every one of you, "Seek my face." O that you knew the day of your visitation! O that you now viewed this mercy as you will most unquestionably view it before long! For, whether you wind up in Heaven or in Hell, be assured that the divine favor will appear to you no light concern.

I would that now the Psalmist's determination were adopted by every one of you. Tell me, I beg you, whether the resolution be not wise; tell me whether it is not necessary. Tell me whether, if you continue to decline God's invitation until the door of Heaven is finally closed against you—that you will not curse your folly with an anguish that will exceed your utmost conceptions, and bewail to all eternity the conduct you now pursue.

I say, then, to every one of you, "Seek after God; seek him instantly, without delay; seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near;" for the time is quickly coming when your day of grace shall be closed, and "God will swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest!"

On the other hand, assure yourselves, that, "if you seek him, he will be found by you," and you shall live forever with God in glory!

Let every one of you, therefore, now go home, and put the matter to a trial. See whether God will not be gracious unto you; see whether he will not answer your prayers, and fulfill your desires, and "do exceeding abundantly for you above all that you can ask or think. I speak with confidence; for, from the beginning of the world to this hour. "He never said to any, Seek my face in vain!"

#539

ADORING GOD FOR HIS MERCIES

**[Psalm 28:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 28.7)**

"The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusts in him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart greatly rejoices; and with my song will I praise him."

The man of this world delights to speak of the things of this world. The man of God delights to speak of God. Each speaks out of the abundance of his own heart.

It is the very character of a true believer, that "he regards the works of the Lord and the operation of his hands," and that he desires to magnify the Lord for all the benefits conferred upon him. No one can read the Psalms of David, without being penetrated with this thought.

What the particular affliction was from which David had recently been delivered when he penned this Psalm, we do not certainly know; but after blessing God for his condescension and grace in hearing and answering his supplications, he records, for the benefit of all future saints, his feelings in the review of the mercies given unto him.

I. In the Psalms we see what God is to the believer.

To all who trust in him, he is both:  
a protector from all evil,  
and a helper to all good.  
  
This is a blessed truth, if considered only in theory.

What cannot he do, that "has the God of Jacob for his help?" To what duty may he not address himself with a full assurance that he shall be able to fulfill it?

Would he overcome the most inveterate lusts? "Through the influence of God's Spirit he shall mortify the deeds of the body," and "bring the very thoughts of his heart into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Would he attain and exercise all the graces of the Spirit? he shall do so, yes, "he shall do all things through Christ strengthening him".

And whom does he need to fear? Surely neither men nor devils; for, what can a man do to the believer, when that man himself is crushed before the worm? As for Satan, though he has at his command all the principalities and powers of Hell, he is a vanquished enemy, and shall before long "be bruised forever under the believer's feet!"

But this truth is yet more blessed, when it is practically experienced by the believer in his own soul.

What a zest does the believer's own experience give to every declaration of the Inspired Volume! When, from the communications he has actually received, he can say: God is my strength and my shield! Then it is that he is prepared to enjoy these blessed truths as he ought, and to give unto God the glory due unto his name.

And here we must exhort every believer to trust in God with his whole heart. In this case he shall never be disappointed of his hope; yes rather, the more he expects, the more he shall receive; and according to his faith it shall be done unto him. Let him only be able to say with David, "My heart trusts in him;" and he shall sooner or later have reason to add, "and I am helped;" I am protected from evils, which I could not by my own wisdom or power avoid; and I am enabled to do things, for which my own strength would have been utterly insufficient. By my own experience therefore, no less than from the divine testimony, I can say, "The Lord is my strength, and my shield."

As from David's assertions we learn what God is to us, so from his frame of mind we may see,

II. What the disposition of our hearts towards God should be.

Certainly these exalted privileges should be received by us:

1. With joy.

Who can have reason to rejoice in comparison with the believer? Look round and see how the world at large are captured in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will.

Have you no reason to rejoice when God has interposed with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm to deliver you? When you see the dangers with which you are surrounded, have you no reason to rejoice in having such a shield as is sufficiently large to encompass you on every side, and so strong as to be impenetrable to all the fiery darts of the devil?

When you see what lusts you have to mortify, and what duties to perform—have you not reason to rejoice in having Omnipotence for your strength? O rejoice; rejoice in the Lord always! Yes, "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory!" However "greatly your heart rejoices," you never need be afraid of excess; let it be but the joy of a dependent being, and it cannot be too great.

2. With thankfulness.

It is your privilege to "sing in the ways of the Lord." In Heaven the redeemed are singing praises to their God day and night; and so should you do on earth. As for David, he would "praise God day and night;" and that too with "all that was within him;" yes, and "as long as he should live." Not content with praising God himself, he would have the sun, moon, and stars, together with everything that had life and breath, to praise him too! [Psalm 145:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-7); [Psalm 148:1-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.1-14). This is a state of mind worthy of a redeemed sinner; nor should we ever rest until we have attained it.

We shall **conclude** this subject with two inquiries:

1. Why is it that so few possess this heavenly frame?

It must be confessed that among the professors of religion, there are but few comparatively in whom the Gospel matures to this life of faith in Christ.

Some are retarded in their growth by "the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust of other things, and never bring forth fruit unto perfection."

Others are remiss in the duties of the prayer-closet, and thereby deprive themselves of those rich communications of grace and peace, which God would otherwise bestow upon them.

And others again are always poring over the evils of their own hearts, instead of contemplating the mercies of their God, and the wonders of redeeming love.

It is not at all surprising that these different characters enjoy but little of that divine unction which is imparted to those only who live in close communion with their God. But let no man impute their lack of joy to any defect in Christianity itself; they are not straitened in their God any more than David was; it is in themselves that they are straitened; and "they receive not, because they ask not." Let them only live near unto God in the exercise of prayer and faith, and they shall find that God is the same in every age: rich in mercy, and "abundant in goodness and truth."

2. How may we all attain this heavenly frame?

We have advantages far beyond any that David ever enjoyed. What David saw under a veil—we behold, as it were, with open face: a God incarnate, taking upon himself the entire care of all his redeemed people, standing between them and the curse of the broken law, and engaging to keep them by his own power unto everlasting salvation. For us there is "help laid upon One that is mighty!" For us there is all fullness treasured up in Christ, so that we are privileged to say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength! [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24). [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.4)."

Let us then improve this privilege as we ought to do; let us "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," yes, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Then may we be assured of final victory, and now, even in the midst of all our conflicts, exult as already victors, yes, as "more than conquerors through Him who loved us, and gave himself for us! [Romans 8:34-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34-39). [Isaiah 26:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3-4)."

#540

GOD OUR SAVING STRENGTH

**[Psalm 28:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 28.8-9)**

"The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever."

In the Psalms of David we observe many rapid transitions from the depth of sorrow to very exalted joy. In the Psalm before us, this is very remarkable; insomuch, that commentators are altogether at a loss to determine whether it was written under a state of deep affliction, out of which he anticipates a joyful outcome; or after a deliverance from affliction, combining with his expressions of gratitude a retrospective view of his preceding trouble. Of these two explications, I much prefer the latter; though I think even that is far from satisfactory.

I conceive that the suddenness of God's answers to prayer, and of the changes wrought thereby upon the feelings of his people, is here marked with very peculiar force and beauty. God has said, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24);" and thus it was in this case. The Psalmist began in a state of extreme dejection; but, in a moment, "his light rose in obscurity, and his darkness became as the noon-day, [Isaiah 58:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10)." The Psalmist elsewhere says, "You have turned my mourning into dancing, [Psalm 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.11);" and thus we see it here realized, "Blessed be the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplications." Then, after returning thanks to his great Deliverer, he proclaims, to the honor of God, what he will be to all his believing people; and he implores from God the same blessings in their behalf. Let us now consider,

I. David's testimony for God.

David himself was "God's anointed." But of himself he had spoken in the preceding verse, "The Lord is my strength." Now, therefore, he speaks of God's redeemed people, even to the end of time. These all are partakers of the Spirit of Him who was "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, [Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.7)." Even under the Jewish dispensation, his people were "a kingdom of priests, [Exodus 19:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.6);" but under the Christian dispensation, all the saints are "a royal priesthood, 1 Peter 2:9," and have the privilege of being "made kings and priests unto God and the Father, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6);" and as all kings and priests under the Law were consecrated with oil, so are these "anointed of the Lord, [2 Corinthians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.21);" and they shall all find God to be "the strength of his people, and a fortress of salvation." Now this is:

1. A **true** testimony.

Search the records of the Bible in every age, and see whether so much as one of the Lord's anointed was not strengthened by him to do and suffer his holy will. Or say, whether many of you, my brethren, are not able to attest the same, from your own experience; and to declare, that "out of weakness you have been made strong, [Hebrews 11:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.34)," and that God has been ever ready to "perfect his own strength in your weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

2. An **encouraging** testimony.

There is not a man upon earth that has any strength in himself; no, "not so much as even to think a good thought! [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5)." Yet, "through the grace of Christ strengthening us, the weakest babe in the universe is able to do all necessary things! [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

Our duties are arduous,  
our enemies are mighty,  
our sufferings are great.

Yet we are eventually made "more than conquerors, through Him who loved, us! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)." There is nothing, then, that we may not readily undertake for God, since "with Him there is everlasting strength, [Isaiah 26:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.4);" and we are authorized to expect, under all possible circumstances, that "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us!"

Persuaded of this blessed truth, let us mark,

II. David's intercession.

Let us mark,

1. The **copiousness** of David's intercession.

His heart was full; and just views of God invariably produce in us a measure of the same feelings towards man. "The Lord's anointed" are "his people and his inheritance, [1 Kings 8:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.51); [1 Kings 8:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.53);" and "if we love God, we cannot but love those who are begotten of him;" and in proportion as we feel our own obligations to God, will our hearts be enlarged in prayer for those who are dear unto him.

2. The **order** of David's intercession.

He begins with imploring their "salvation" from all guilt and danger.

He then begs of God to load them with all "blessings" in their journey through this dreary wilderness world.

He entreats that they may be "fed," and "governed," and protected—as sheep by a careful shepherd, or as a faithful people by a wise and powerful Prince. See [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.23-24).

And, lastly, he desires that they may be "exalted" to happiness and glory in the eternal world.

Thus does he implore of God to confer on them all that they can ever need, "giving them grace and glory, and withholding nothing from those who can by any means conduce to their eternal welfare, [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11).

3. The **extent** of David's intercession.

He desires these things for all, without exception. There is not one so good or great, but that he needs all these things at the hands of God; nor one so base, but that he may expect of God a supply of all these things, in answer to the prayers thus offered for him.

Behold, then, brethren,

1. Your **duty**.

God commands that we "make our intercession for all men." And, if we have any just knowledge of God, we shall pray for our fellow-creatures. Do not say, "I know not how to pray." I well know that this is a common complaint; but I am perfectly assured, that the straitness of which we complain, and perhaps justly complain, arises, in a very great measure, from our ignorance of God, and of the divine life. If we spread our own wants before God, and obtained answers to our prayers, as David did—we should, like David, become intercessors for others, and find at the throne of grace a liberty of which we have at present but little conception.

2. Your **privilege**.

Are you to ask all these things for others; and shall you lack them yourselves? No, brethren; you may ask salvation from all the penal effects of sin; you may ask for blessings, even all that a fallen creature can by any means need; you may ask for provision and protection to the utmost extent of your necessities; yes, you may ask for all the glory and felicity of Heaven; and God will bestow it all. "Open your mouth ever so wide, and he will fill it!" Yes, "he will do exceeding abundantly for you above all that you can ask or think!"

#541

GOD THE GIVER OF STRENGTH AND PEACE

**[Psalm 29:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 29.10-11)**

"The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."

This Psalm is supposed to have been written on the occasion of a thunder-storm. It represents God as uttering his voice in those terrific sounds, whereby the very mountains are made to shake, yes and "skip, as it were, like a calf or a young wild ox." That there is a transition to the Messiah, and his offices, is clear; for he is expressly declared to be King in Zion. And this declaration stands in immediate connection with the floods and tumults by which, in appearance, he was for a season overwhelmed, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in Heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." [Psalm 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-6)."

He is also called Jehovah; as it is written, "This is the name whereby he shall be called, "The Lord our Righteousness! [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)." And I rather think, that, in order the more strongly to mark his divine character, the name Jehovah is here so often repeated. It is repeated no less than eighteen times in these eleven verses; and it is the same person who is spoken of throughout the whole. The same person of whom the Psalmist says, in the first five verses, "Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon."

Of that same person does he say in my text, "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."

That my text refers to him, there can be no doubt; for he is "that Mighty One, upon whom the help of his people is laid;" and he is, "The Prince of Peace," from whom all their peace must flow. We may therefore proceed to consider the Lord Jesus.

I. The Lord Jesus is the God of **Providence**.

The Lord Jesus "is the Creator of all things," and "by Him all things are held together;" nor does anything occur which is not decreed by him. We speak of things as accidental; but there is nothing really accidental—not even "the falling of a sparrow," or the loss of "a hair of our head."

It is true that creatures make their own plans—and often with an express desire to oppose the will of God. But they are all unconscious agents in His hands! "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen!"

The envy of the Jewish priests,  
the treachery of Judas,  
the timidity of Pilate,  
the cruelty of the Roman soldiers,  
were all subservient to God's designs, and all fulfilled His inscrutable purposes! They followed the dictates of their own minds; but in all their actions, "God's counsel stood," and He accomplished His own sovereign and eternal will through them!

Behold our blessed Lord in every change of situation, from His arrest, to the grave—who would suppose that these were successive steps to the throne of Heaven, and the means ordained for the salvation of His people? Yet this was really the case; and by all these events a multitude of conflicting prophecies were fulfilled. He sat at the helm, and directed all the storm!

And precisely thus He does at this time also. The occurrences of every successive day seem as if they arose randomly, and pass away without any particular effect. But He who sees all things from the beginning, has ordained that a sleepless night, an opening of a book, a casting of a lot—shall all as certainly effect His ends—as any event, however great, or however manifestly connected with His designs! Esther 3:7; [Esther 6:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 6.1-2)

The history of Joseph, whose elevation to a throne was promoted by events which, to the eye of sense, would appear most calculated to counteract it. In the outcome, Joseph said to his treacherous brothers, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good, to bring about the present result—the survival of many people!" [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20)

Be the storm ever so tempestuous, "He sits upon the flood;" and be our enemies ever so mighty, "he sits as King forever," to control their efforts, and overrule them for our good.

But let us contemplate him,

II. The Lord Jesus is the God of **grace**.

The Lord Jesus Christ, on his ascension to Heaven, was constituted "head over all things to his Church;" and a fullness was treasured up in him, for the use of his believing people in all ages. From this fullness he is ever ready to impart unto them:

1. Strength.

Great, exceeding great, is the work which they have to perform, as are also the trials which they have to sustain. But, through him, the weakest of his people shall be able "to do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)," and to suffer all things, [Colossians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11-12), as circumstances may require. Whatever their situation may be, "their strength shall be according to their day, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25);" and, however weak they may be in themselves, "his strength shall be perfected in their weakness, 2 Corinthians 12:9." So seasonable shall be his supplies of grace to their souls, and so sufficient for all their necessities.

2. Peace.

In a storm which threatened their destruction, the disciples were alarmed. But our blessed Lord reproved them for not having a more entire trust in him, [Mark 4:37-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.37-41). Whatever confederacies of men or devils may be against us, we should dismiss all fear, and "sanctify him in our hearts," as all-sufficient for our protection! [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14). It is said of all his people, "He will keep them in perfect peace, because they trust in him, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3)." And well may they be in peace; for, being accepted by God, they may possess an assured peace with him, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1), and, being upheld in his arms, they may laugh at all the assaults of their enemies; for, "if He is for them—then who can be against them [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)." And this peace is a "blessing" of the highest order; for, as it is the exclusive privilege of the Lord's redeemed people, [Isaiah 57:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.1), so is it, both in its nature and operations, more excellent than can be adequately conceived; it truly "surpasses all understanding! [Philippians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.7)."

APPLICATION.

1. Give him, then, the glory due unto his name.

We should get into the very spirit of the Psalmist, and have our minds filled with a sense of our Savior's power and grace; and praise him, not by words only, but by that perfect trust which he calls for at your hands; and which is necessary, in order that you may obtain the blessings he is exalted to bestow.

2. Let his voice control every emotion of your souls.

He speaks by thunders and lightnings, and he also speaks by his Word. By thunders and lightnings he displays his power, and by his Word he reveals his grace. Notice particularly how, in the Psalm before us, everything is ascribed to his voice. And I am sure that, if you will listen to the still small voice of his Word, there is not a blessing which you can possibly need, but it shall be imparted in the richest abundance to your souls.

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THE MERCY OF GOD

**[Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5)**, **[10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Psalm 30.10)**

"His anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning!"  
"Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help."

In the title affixed to this Psalm, it is called "A Psalm, or song, at the dedication of the house of David." If we understand this as referring to a dedication of his house on his first entrance upon it, [2 Samuel 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.11), there is nothing in the Psalm at all suitable to the occasion; but if we refer it to the period of his return to it after the death of Absalom, we shall find a suitableness in it to the circumstances in which he had been placed, [2 Samuel 20:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 20.5). He had been driven from his throne at a time when he appeared to be most firmly fixed upon it; and had been in most imminent danger of his life, from the hands of his own favorite, but rebellious son, Absalom. God, however, had mercifully interposed for his deliverance, and had restored him once more in safety to his own house. To purify his house from the pollution it had sustained from Absalom, he dedicated it afresh; and penned this Psalm, it should seem, for the occasion. But, as this is a matter of conjecture only, and not of certainty, I shall wave all further allusion to either of the occasions; and take the words of my text simply as expressing a most weighty truth, which is at all times, and under all circumstances, proper for our consideration.

Two things we shall notice from it:

I. The mercy of God.

The mercy of God will be found to be altogether of a boundless extent:

1. We shall consider the mercy of God **as existing in his own bosom**.

He is indeed angry both at sin itself and at those who commit it; and his anger he will surely manifest against every impenitent transgressor. "His wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men! [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18);" and it will surely "break forth against all the children of disobedience, [Ephesians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.6)." Nevertheless, the inflicting of his judgments is "a strange act," to which he is utterly averse, [Isaiah 28:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.21). "Mercy" is the attribute in which "he most delights! [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18);" and, when he proclaimed his name, it was that by which he most desired to be known, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin! [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7)." The whole of the Scriptures represent him in this view, and declare, with one voice, that he is "rich in mercy, [Ephesians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.4)," and that "his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting unto those who fear him, [Psalm 103:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.17)."

2. We shall consider the mercy of God **as experienced by his people**.

Against the impenitent God's anger must, of necessity, continue. But towards the penitent and believing, it is of the shortest possible duration, "His anger endures but for a moment."

When Nathan pressed home upon the conscience of David the guilt he had contracted in the matter of Uriah, and had brought him to this acknowledgment, "I have sinned against the Lord!"—the prophet was instantly directed by God to declare, that his iniquity, notwithstanding the enormity of it, was pardoned, "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die! [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13)."

Had there been any bounds to his mercy, Manasseh could never have found acceptance with him. The wickedness of that monarch exceeded all that one would have supposed a human being was capable of committing; yet even he was pardoned, as soon as he humbled himself before his God, [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13).

How rapidly the mercy of God flies to the healing of a contrite soul, may be seen, as in numberless other instances, so in the Psalm before us, "Hear, O Lord," said David, "and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help;" and then he immediately adds, "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, verse 10, 11. For the further elucidation of this, see [Jeremiah 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.12-14); [Jeremiah 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.22); [Jeremiah 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 4.1)."

The whole preceding context, while it declares God's mercy, sets also before us,

II. Our duty in the contemplation of God's mercy.

As having experienced mercy, all Christians are called to sing, and praise our God. But, as we are not all in the holy frame of David, and as the text itself suggests views somewhat different from those of joyous exultation, I shall adhere rather to the words before us, and point out our duty, not so much in the contemplation of God's mercy enjoyed, as of God's mercy needed and desired.

Though God so delights in the exercise of mercy—yet he requires that we seek it at his hands, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37).

1. We must seek God's mercy **supremely**.

"In his favor is life;" and the enjoyment of it must be our one object of pursuit. Not only must all earthly things be as nothing in our estimation, but life itself must be of no value in comparison with it. To have our interest in his favor a matter of doubt, must be as death to our souls; and we must live only to obtain reconciliation with him. What the frame of our minds, in reference to it, should be—we may see in those words of David, "I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul! [Psalm 143:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.6-8)."

2. We must seek God's mercy **humbly**.

"Weeping may endure for a night." We should certainly weep and mourn for our sins, as our blessed Lord has told us in his sermon on the mount, [Matthew 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.4) with [Luke 6:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.20-21). And who among us has not just ground to weep? Who is there that has not reason to smite upon his bosom with grief and shame for his past life, and, like David, to say, "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears! [Psalm 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.6)." This should be the experience of us all, "We must sow in tears, if ever we would reap in joy! [Psalm 126:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5)." Shall this be thought suited to the Mosaic dispensation only? It is not a whit less necessary under the Gospel dispensation, "Be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord; and he shall lift you up."

3. We must seek God's mercy **confidently**.

We should never doubt God's readiness to accept us, when we return to him. Whether our night of weeping be more or less dark, or of a longer or shorter duration, we should feel assured that "a morning of joy shall come," when "there shall be given to us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3)." In the contemplation of God's mercy as revealed in the Gospel, we should see, that he can be "a just God, and yet a Savior, [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21);" yes, that because "he is faithful and just, he will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9)."

To the exercise of his mercy He has assigned no limit; and we should assign none. We should be perfectly assured that "the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse from all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" that "God will cast out none who come to him in his Son's name, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37);" on the contrary, that "though our sins have been red like crimson," we shall, through the Redeemer's blood, "be made as white as snow! [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18)."

In this view of our subject, I would call your attention to the following obvious and beneficial **reflections**.

1. How deeply to be pitied, are the blind impenitent world!

They will not believe that God is angry with them, or that they have any need to dread his displeasure. If we attempt to convince them of their danger, they account us no better than gloomy enthusiasts. But, whether they will believe it or not, God's eye is upon them for evil; and if they do not turn to him in penitence and faith, they shall before long feel the weight of his avenging arm!

Who that should see a multitude of people, like Baal's priests, unconscious of their impending fate—and would not pity them? Yet here are millions of immortal souls soon to be summoned into the presence of their Judge, and mocking the eternal doom that speedily awaits them! Should not "rivers of tears run down our eyes for them? [Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.136)." Yes, truly; as our Lord wept over Jerusalem in the view of the destruction that awaited it, and as the Apostle Paul had "great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart" on account of his unbelieving brethren, [Romans 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.2), so should we mourn bitterly for those who will not mourn and be m bitterness for themselves.

2. How richly blessed, is the weeping penitent!

His carnal friends perhaps pity him for his weakness, or deride him for his folly. But the angels around the throne are of a very different mind; they, even in the presence of God himself, have an augmentation of their joy from one single spectacle like this! [Luke 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.10); and God himself is not so intent on the heavenly hosts, but that he spies out such a poor object as this, and looks upon him with delight! [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2).

Is there, then, one weeping penitent here present? My brother! crowns and kingdoms are of no value in comparison with the blessing conferred on you! Be content to go on weeping, as long as God shall see fit to keep you in that state of discipline; but know, that "joy is sown for you;" and that, in due season, it shall spring up to an abundant harvest; for thus says the Lord, "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him! [Psalm 126:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.6)."

3. What praises and thanksgivings are due to God from the pardoned sinner!

Brethren! At present you can have but little conception of the incomprehensible blessings which God has conferred upon you; for you cannot see one thousandth part of your guilt, or conceive one thousandth part of the glory that awaits you!

Still less can you comprehend the wonders of redeeming love and mercy that have been given to you in the gift of God's only dear Son for your redemption!

What indeed you already know, is abundantly sufficient to fill your souls with unutterable joy, and your lips with incessant praise.

But what will be your feelings at the instant of the departure of your soul from this earthly tabernacle, and of its admission into the presence of your God? Then you will fully see the depth of misery from which you have been redeemed, and the height of the glory to which you are exalted!

You will then behold your Redeemer face to face; and join in the eternal praises of our adorable Savior. "And they will reign for ever and ever!" [Revelation 22:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.5)

"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should—how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is! May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)"

Surely these things should be ever on your minds; they should make you to be "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of that blessed day." But, suppose that your night of weeping were to continue to the very hour of your dissolution, how short would it appear, when once that morning burst upon your view! Are you not ashamed that you should ever grudge the seed for such a harvest? Will not one hour of that glory be an ample recompense for all the exertions you ever made for the attainment of it? Go on, then, with Heaven in your view, and live in the sweet anticipation of that unimaginable glory that awaits you. Methinks the very prospect of such a morning constitutes its very dawn, and will be to your souls the commencement of Heaven upon earth.

#543

CAUSE AND CURE OF SPIRITUAL DESERTION

**[Psalm 30:6-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.6-12)**

When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: "What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help." You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever!"

Among all the friends of vital godliness, it is supposed that Christian experience is well understood; but it is a lamentable truth, that those in general who think themselves best acquainted with it, are exceedingly mistaken with respect to some of its most important parts. The distinctive offices of faith and unbelief, of confidence and fear—are by no means clearly defined in the minds either of ministers or people; on the contrary, they are often so confounded as to produce very serious evils; for by the misconceptions respecting them, many are instructed to shun what God approves, and to cultivate what he abhors.

For instance: A persuasion that we are God's elect people, and that we are in no danger of perishing—is recommended by many as the root and summit of Christian faith. While a fear lest we might have deceived ourselves, or might ultimately perish—is characterized as an evil heart of unbelief. And thus, a godly jealousy over ourselves is discouraged as a sin—and an unfounded confidence respecting our state is encouraged as a virtue!

These mistakes arise partly from a blind following of human authorities, and partly from being confined by the trammels of human systems of theology. To have just views on these subjects is of great importance both for ministers and people: for ministers, that they may know how to discriminate between good and evil in their flocks; and to the people, that they may form such an estimate of themselves as God himself forms of them.

The Psalm before us will afford us an occasion for marking the distinctions which we conceive to be so eminently useful, and yet so generally needed. It is said in the title to have been written at the dedication of David's house; but we apprehend it was rather at the second dedication of it, after it had been shamefully denied by Absalom. To this period of time, rather than to any other, we are directed by many parts of the Psalm. It should seem that about that time the prosperity of David had lulled him into a state of undue security; and that God sent him this affliction to rouse him from it. The successive frames of his mind are here clearly marked; and must successively be considered as they are here presented to our view:

I. David's carnal security.

There being to all appearance perfect tranquility in his kingdom, David conceived that no evil could arise to disturb his repose; and it seems that a similar confidence was also indulged by him in reference to his spiritual enemies. This is, indeed, the common effect of long continued prosperity; but it is a state of mind highly displeasing to God.

We are dependent creatures; and ought at all times to feel that whatever blessings we have, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature, is but lent to us from hour to hour, according to the good pleasure of Him "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." The very continuance of our lives should be regarded in this view so that we should never think of what we will do in the next year, or even on the morrow, without an express reference to God as the sovereign controller of all events, [James 4:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.13-15). Job himself erred exceedingly in this respect, when he said, "I shall die in my nest! [Job 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.18)."

The same sense of dependence on God must more especially be maintained in reference to our spiritual life. The very chief of the Apostles, no less than we, needed to preserve upon his mind a consciousness, that, without incessant vigilance and care, he might, "after having preached to others, himself become a cast-away." However confident any man may be that he stands firm, it becomes him to "take heed lest he fall, [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12)." And so far is this frame of mind from being, as religious people are apt to imagine it, an effect of legality and unbelief, it is pronounced by God himself as most pleasing to him, and beneficial to us; for "blessed is the man who fears always, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14)."

It is worthy of observation, that David ostensibly acknowledged God as the author of his security, "You by your favor have made my mountain to stand firm;" but it is evident that his confidence was not really in God, so much as in his prosperous situation and circumstances, which had to all appearance a stability on which he might rely.

Just so it is with those among ourselves who have fallen into a state of carnal security; they profess to depend on God; but their lack of holy fear demonstrates, that their confidence is in something which they themselves possess, and which they consider as affording a just ground for the dismissal of vigilance and jealous apprehension.

David's relaxation of this beneficial fear was followed by,

II. His spiritual dereliction.

To punish this carnal security, God withdrew from David in some measure the protection of his providence, and the comforts of his grace; he allowed Absalom to carry into effect his traitorous conspiracy against him; and he left David without those heavenly consolations which under former trials he had been accustomed to experience, "You hid your face from me," says David, "and I was troubled."

Now such rebukes must be expected by all who forget their dependence upon God. "Truly he is a God who hides himself;" and by the dispensations of his providence and grace he marks his indignation against the backslidings of his people.

We doubt not but that God's withdrawment of many temporal blessings from us, is a punishment for our idolatrous attachment to them, and dependence upon them. It was for this that he sent a worm to destroy Jonah's gourd; and for this he required the soul of him who thought "he had much goods laid up for many years."

We doubt not also, but that the experience of every child of God will more or less attest the same in reference to the withdrawment of his presence from them. In proportion as any have become less vigilant, they lose those manifestations of the Divine presence which in the seasons of holy fear they were privileged to enjoy. Nor is it a mere privation of joy which they experience on such occasions; there is a perturbation of mind arising from a sense of the Divine displeasure, and a painful apprehension lest they should never be restored to the favor of their God. David's "trouble," as arising from this source, was of a very overwhelming nature, [Psalm 77:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.2-4); and woe be to those who wantonly provoke God to inflict it on them. [Deuteronomy 32:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.20).

In what way David sought deliverance from this trouble, we see by,

III. His fervent prayers.

How he pleaded with God, may be seen in our text; and in this he affords an excellent pattern for us under similar circumstances. His plea is to this effect, 'Lord, withdraw not yourself from me forever; it is through your help alone that I can ever recover the state from which I am fallen; and without such a recovery I can never bring any glory to your name. O leave me not in the wretched state into which I am fallen!'

Now here we see the true, the only, remedy for a soul that has provoked God to depart from it. To have recourse to the doctrines of election and final perseverance under such circumstances, is the way to foster that very disease which God is seeking, by this discipline, to cure. We do not say that we are to keep the promises of God out of sight; for beyond a doubt we are to make use of them at all times and on all occasions; but then we are to make use of them, not for the fostering of an unhumbled confidence in God, but for the encouraging of our humiliation before God. We are to be constantly on our guard "not to heal our wounds slightly, or to cry, Peace, peace! when there is no peace."

We should bear in mind that the humbling of our souls is the very end which God aims at in withdrawing his presence from us; and the more we answer this end, the better; nay, if by the suspension of his favor towards us we are brought to a more earnest crying after him, and to an utter abhorrence of ourselves in dust and ashes, we shall have as much reason to adore him for such discipline, as for the most exalted joys he ever afforded us.

This also is a point which we conceive to be of exceeding great importance for the due regulation of our own minds, and for the right counseling of those who are under the hidings of God's face.

The excellency and efficacy of this remedy may be seen in,

IV. David's speedy recovery.

There are many who go mourning almost all their lives. And why? Is it that God arbitrarily, and without occasion, hides his face from them? No! It is owing to this very thing which we have been speaking of, namely, their restraining prayer before God, and not using the proper means of regaining his favor. Indeed many are brought into absolute despair by the very means which they use to remove their apprehensions; they go to the consideration of God's secret decrees, when they should be mourning over their sins, and imploring pardon for Christ's sake. Hence they are led to argue thus: 'If I am an elect vessel, then how could I be in such darkness and distress? But I am in this darkness, therefore God has not elected me; and there is no hope for me.'

But behold the effect of humiliation and contrition! See how speedily God returned to the soul of his servant, in answer to his fervent supplications! The prayers were scarcely offered, before David was enabled to say, "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness." And thus would it be with all of us, if we would pursue the method which this holy man adopted. "God delights in the prosperity of his servants;" and, as a parent feels relief to his own soul when he can return in love to his offending child, so does God, when he can again lift up the light of his countenance on those from whom he has been constrained for a season to withhold it. See [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.27) and [Psalm 81:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.13-16).

The father's reception of his prodigal son is a sure and delightful specimen of the favor which all will experience, as soon as ever they are brought to the footstool of Divine grace with cries for mercy in the all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ.

The testimony of David in this very Psalm shall be confirmed in you, "His anger endures but a moment; in his favor is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning! verse 5."

The speedy restoration of God's favor to him immediately drew forth,

V. David's grateful acknowledgments.

To bring David back to a state of holy peace and joy was the very end for which God so graciously renewed to him the expressions of his love; it was, says David, "to the end that my glory may sing praise to you, and not be silent." He calls his tongue "his glory," because that is the member by which above all he could glorify his God; and he determines instantly to employ it in his praise, "O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto you forever!" Blessed resolution! O that every one of us would instantly adopt it! O that God would inspire us with grace sufficient to carry it into execution.

It is in order to bring all to this point, that we have been so particular in the foregoing statement. It is with a view to this, that we so earnestly recommend humiliation before God under seasons of darkness, rather than an attention to abstract points which tend only to foster a delusion. Humility, and contrition, and a believing application of the blood of Christ to our souls, can never deceive us; but, on the contrary, must infallibly lead to songs of praise and thanksgiving, "if we sow in tears—then we must reap in joy."

Only observe the process, and see how connected are all the links of the chain:

1. In a season of prosperity, we have relapsed into carnal confidence, and provoked God to leave us in a state of spiritual dereliction.

2. Alarmed and humbled by God's frowns, we betake ourselves to fervent prayer, imploring mercy in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and through the unbounded grace of God we experience a speedy recovery.

3. Then we have our mouths filled with grateful acknowledgments to the God of our salvation.

We only add to this, that the deeper is our humiliation on account of sin committed—the more speedy and exalted will be our joys on account of deliverance given.

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are walking with God.

What shall we say! Even if you were as eminent as ever David was, we should think it right to guard you against the conceit that you were in no danger of being "moved." In relation to all that you possess of temporal things, we would inculcate this beneficial lesson, "From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away! [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)." Every blessing we have, must be held as from God, and for God, to be disposed of according to his sovereign will and pleasure. And in reference to everything of a spiritual nature, we should recommend a constant sense of our entire dependence upon God, saying, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe." Some will confound this with unbelief; but it differs from unbelief as much as humility from pride. In truth, it is the very root of faith; for it is only in proportion as we feel our liability to fall, that we shall look truly and constantly to Christ for strength. Be weak as newborn infants in yourselves, and God will keep beneath you his everlasting arms, and perfect "his own strength in your weakness!"

2. To those in spiritual declension.

Many in a state of spiritual declension are ready to imagine that God has arbitrarily and without any particular cause, withdrawn himself from them. But it may well be doubted whether in any case God ever dealt thus with any of his creatures.

Our blessed Lord, when he cried, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" was suffering the punishment due to those whose iniquities had been laid on him.

And Job, whose expression, "I shall die in my nest," we have before noticed, had evidently a measure of carnal confidence which needed to be mortified and subdued. With the exception of his case we are not aware of anything that bears even the appearance of arbitrary proceeding on the part of God; the constant tenor of his acting is that which was proclaimed to Asa, "The Lord is with you, while you are with him; if you seek him—then he will be found by you; but if you forsake him—then he will forsake you, [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2)."

Learn then to trace your sin in your punishment; and, if you cannot find the immediate cause of his withdrawment from you, then pray to him, with Job, "Show me why you contend with me." The prayer which David offered under such circumstances, [Psalm 143:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.1-8), will assuredly, if offered up in faith, bring down upon you the blessings of peace and joy. This God himself has promised in [Isaiah 57:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.16-18); and you may be as fully assured of its accomplishment to your soul, as the promise and oath of God can make you, [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10) with [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18).

#544

OUR TIMES IN GOD'S HAND

**[Psalm 31:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.15)**

"My times are in your hand!"

To the ungodly desire to deny the providence of God, and to cut him off, as it were, from any connection with his creatures. But the saints find a rich consolation in the thought that God reigns. This it is which reconciles them to the evils they endure, and fortifies them against those which they have reason to fear.

David, in the Psalm before us, complains that there were many who "took counsel together against him, and devised to take away his life." But he comforted himself in the reflection, that, however man might be his enemy, God was "his God;" and that however bitterly his enemies might be enraged against him, "his times were not in their hands, but in God's;" and, consequently, that they could do nothing against David but by God's permission.

From this view of the text we are led to notice:

I. Our **dependence** on God.

God is the Governor of the universe.

He appoints the stars their courses.

He makes the raging elements to fulfill his will, [Psalm 148:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.8).

He imposes a restraint upon the most savage beasts, causing them to suppress or forget their instinctive ferocity, or overruling the exercise of it, for the preservation or destruction of men, as he sees occasion, ([1 Kings 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 13.28) [Daniel 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.22). [Jonah 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.17). [2 Kings 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.24))

The affairs of men he more especially controls.

1. In God's hands are the circumstances of **life**.

There is not really any 'chance' or 'accident' in the world. It is God who arranges for us, from our earliest infancy, to the last hour of our lives. "He determines the bounds of our habitation, [Acts 17:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.26)."

If we are called to the possession of wealth, or deprived of it by any untoward circumstances, it is "the Lord who gives, and the Lord who takes it away, [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21)."

If we enjoy health, or pine away in sickness, it is "the Lord who both wounds and heals, who kills and makes alive, [1 Samuel 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.6-7)." "There is neither good nor evil in the city, but the Lord is the doer of it, [Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.6)."

Even the falling of a hair from our head, as trifling as it is, only takes place by Gods appointment, [Matthew 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.30).

2. In God's hands are the circumstances of **death**.

To every man "there is an appointed time upon earth, [Job 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.1);" there are "bounds which he cannot pass, [Job 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.5)." "God holds our souls in life, [Psalm 66:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.9);" and "when he takes away our breath, we die, and return to the dust, [Psalm 104:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 104.29)." Youth and health are no security against the stroke of death! The most vigorous constitutions are soon broken, when God is pleased to afflict us, [Job 21:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.23-25); the skill of physicians, however useful when attended with his blessing, is of no avail, [Mark 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.26). So numerous are the occasions of death, that no caution can possibly avoid them, "It will be as though a man fled from a lion, only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall, only to have a snake bite him! [Amos 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.19)." When God "requires our souls," we must surrender them at his call, [Luke 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.20)." Our days are protracted to an advanced age, only if God is pleased to uphold us; if not, our course is finished as soon as ever it is commenced. It is "in God, and in God alone, that we live, and move, and have our being! [Acts 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.28)."

But though these ideas are certainly comprehended in the text, its more immediate scope is to declare,

II. Our **security** in God.

We have already observed that the words of the text were introduced by David as a consolatory reflection, under the cruel treatment which he had received from friends and enemies. We are therefore taught by them to assure ourselves:

1. That none can destroy us before our divinely appointed time.

We appear to be, yes, we really are, in the midst of many and great dangers. But however we may be encompassed with enemies, they cannot prevail against us until the Lord's appointed time for our death has come.

David was continually exposed to the rage and jealousy of Saul, who repeatedly cast a javelin at him, and hunted him incessantly with armed bands "like a partridge upon the mountains." Yet though he was often in the most imminent danger, [1 Samuel 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.26), and certainly would have been betrayed by the men of Keilah, [1 Samuel 23:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.11-12)—yet God watched over him, and kept him in perfect safety.

Many sought to apprehend our Lord; but "they could not lay hands on him until his hour was come, [John 7:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.30); [John 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.20). [Luke 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.33);" and even then Pilate "could have had no power against him, unless it had been given him from above [John 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.11)."

Paul was in innumerable perils, "and in deaths often, [2 Corinthians 11:23-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-27);" once he was stoned, and even left for dead, [Acts 14:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.19-20); but none could take away his life, until he had finished the course which God marked out for him.

Thus we also are immortal, until our work is done. We are surrounded with "chariots of fire, and horses of fire, [2 Kings6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings6.17);" yes, "God himself is a wall of fire round about us, [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5)." And sooner shall successive bands of enemies be struck dead upon the spot by fire from Heaven [2 Kings 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.10-12), than one of the Lord's little ones shall perish! [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14)."

2. That none shall effectually harm us without God's permission.

As we depend on God for our happiness as well as for our existence, so are both our being and our well-being are secured by him. Satan could not touch the person or the property of Job, until he had obtained permission from God to do so, [Job 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.12); [Job 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.6). "Nor can any weapon that is formed against us prosper, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17)," any further than our God shall see good to permit it. "His angels encamp round about us, [Psalm 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.7)," and have an especial charge to "keep us in all our ways, that we do not dash our foot against a stone, [Psalm 91:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.11-12)." "You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you! [Psalm 91:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.5-7)."

We are not indeed at liberty to rush needlessly into danger, from an expectation that God will deliver us; (this would be to "tempt the Lord our God, [Matthew 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.6-7).") But in the path of duty we have nothing to fear. We may "tread upon the lion, the adder, or the dragon, [Psalm 91:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.13). [Acts 28:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.3-6);" we may drink poison itself, [Mark 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.18), or allow ourselves to be committed to the flames—without experiencing the smallest injury, [Daniel 3:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.25-27). Nothing in the whole universe can "harm us, if we are followers of that which is good, [1 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13);" if God sees fit to keep us, we are as safe "in a den of lions" as in a house of friends.

From this subject we may LEARN:

1. To **seek** God without delay.

There is no period of life when we can call one day, or one hour, our own. We are altogether "in God's hands;" and, if he withdraws his support for one moment, we will perish, as certainly as a stone gravitates to the earth. Shall we then, when so entirely dependent on our God, provoke him to cast us out of his hands? Shall we continue to despise his patience and forbearance, until he swears in his wrath that our "time shall be no longer, [Revelation 10:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 10.6)." Think, how many have lost the time afforded them, and how bitterly they now bewail their folly; and beg of God, that he would "so teach you to number your days, that you may apply your hearts unto wisdom, [Psalm 90:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.12)."

2. To **serve** God without fear.

We are too apt to keep back from serving God through fear of the persecutions we may endure from man. But, if our times are in God's hands—then all our concerns must be there too; and nothing can befall us but by his appointment, "Who are you, then, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and forget the Lord your Maker? [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13)." Are we not told, that "the wrath of man shall praise him, [Psalm 76:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.10)." Be bold then for God, "set your face as a flint against the world, [Isaiah 49:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.7-9)," and trust in him for protection.

He will not indeed screen you from all trials; because it is on many accounts necessary for your growth in grace that you should feel them, [1 Peter 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6); but he will allow none to come upon you which he will not enable you to bear, none which he will not sanctify to your eternal good! [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13).

3. To **trust** God without worry.

It is foolish as well as impious to distrust God, or to murmur at any of his dispensations. In whose hands could the disposal of all events be placed so much to our advantage, as in his who possesses infinite wisdom to devise what is best, and infinite power to effect it?

Would we be made the sport of chance or fortune? Or would we have our present and everlasting concerns left wholly to our own management? If we are not fit to regulate our temporal affairs until we attain the age of manhood—then how much less can we ever be competent to take the reins of God's government into our own hands, and to order the affairs of his kingdom?

But our times will be in God's hands, whether we acquiesce in it or not. Let us therefore contentedly leave ourselves to his all-wise disposal, assured that "he does all things well." "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)

#545

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE

**[Psalm 31:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.19-20)**

"How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you. In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues."

The salvation of the Gospel is a present salvation. The "godliness which it inspires is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come." It is needless to say that the trials of life are great; and that men in every situation of life need the supports and consolations of religion to carry them through the difficulties which they have to encounter. But of the extent to which these supports and consolations are administered to God's chosen people, very little idea can be formed by those who have never experienced a communication of them to their souls.

David was highly favored in this respect. He lived in a state of near and habitual fellowship with God; spreading before him all his needs, and receiving from him such supplies of grace and peace as his daily necessities required. Hence with devout rapture he expresses his admiration of Gods goodness to his believing people.

This is the subject which we propose for our present meditation; and which, in correspondence with the words of our text, we shall consider:

I. In a general view.

The terms by which the Lord's people are characterized sufficiently distinguish them from all others, since none but they do truly "fear God," or sincerely "put their trust in him." They are the true Israel; in reference to whom it is said, "God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a pure heart, [Psalm 73:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.1)."

In speaking of his goodness to them, we shall notice,

1. The goodness which is "**stored up** for those who fear" God.

In the time of David the great truths of the Gospel were but indistinctly known; the fuller manifestation of them being reserved for the Apostolic age; as Paul, quoting a remarkable passage from the Prophet Isaiah, says, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man—the things which God has prepared for those who love him;" and then adds, "But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit, [Isaiah 64:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.4) with [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10)."

To the Jewish Church therefore these things are only "stored up," as it were, in types and prophecies; and though made known in the Gospel, they are still but imperfectly viewed by the Christian world; and may be considered as "stored up" for the Church at this time, no less than in former ages; for it is only by slow degrees that anyone attains to the knowledge of them; and whatever attainments anyone may have made, he sees only "as in a looking-glass darkly, and knows only in part;" there being in it a length and breadth and depth and height utterly beyond the power of any finite intelligence to explore! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19). The "riches" that are stored up for us in Christ even in this world are altogether "unsearchable, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8);" what then must those glories be which are "reserved in Heaven for us!" The more we contemplate the blessings which God has treasured up for us in the Son of his love, the more shall we exclaim with David, "Oh how great is his goodness!"

2. The goodness which God has **already done** for those who fear Him.

Every believer was once "dead in trespasses and sins," even as others. But he has been quickened by the mighty energy of God's Spirit, and been raised up to newness of life.

He is "a new creature in Christ Jesus;" all of his views, his desires, his purposes, being radically changed!

He has the heart of stone taken from him, and a heart of flesh substituted in its place.

He has been "made a partaker of the divine nature," and "been renewed after God's image; and that, not in knowledge only, but in righteousness also and true holiness."

He is brought altogether into a new state, having been "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," and been made "an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ."

In a word, he is "begotten to an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled and never-fading, reserved in Heaven for him;" and for the full possession of which he also is reserved by the power of God, through the simple exercise of faith [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4).

All this God has done for those who fear him, "before the sons of men." They are evidently "the seed which the Lord has blessed;" they are "lights in a dark world," "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men".

But in the latter part of our text, we are called to consider the goodness of God towards his people:

II. The goodness of God towards his people, with a particular reference to their relationship with the ungodly world.

Exceeding bitter are those pains which men inflict on each other by calumnies and reproaches!

To speak good one of another, affords no particular pleasure; but to hear and circulate some evil report affords to the carnal mind, the highest gratification; and in such employment all the corruptions of our fallen nature find ample scope for exercise and indulgence. Who can estimate the evils arising from "pride," and "the strife of tongues?" Some little idea may be formed from the description given of the tongue by an inspired Apostle James: "Behold," says he, "the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by Hell! [James 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.5-6)." How exceedingly strong are these descriptions! Yet it is by no means an exaggerated statement of the evils proceeding from calumny in the world at large. But as representing the virulence and malignity with which men calumniate the people of God, these words come yet nearer to the truth.

In the very words preceding my text, David faintly portrays the conduct of the ungodly in relation to this matter, "Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous!" [Psalm 31:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.18). In another Psalm he speaks in far stronger terms, "My soul," says he, "is in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts—men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords! [Psalm 57:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.4)."

The truth is, that men can inflict, and often do inflict, far deeper wounds with their tongue than they could with the most powerful weapon! With a sword they can only wound the body; but with bitter and cruel words they wound the inmost soul. Under the former we may easily support ourselves; but "a wounded spirit who can bear?"

But against these calumnies and reproaches, God provides an effectual antidote for his people.

Though more exposed than others to the venomous assaults of slander, they have a refuge which the worldling knows nothing of. They carry their trials to the Lord, and spread them before him; and from him they receive such supports and consolations as more than counterbalance the evils they sustain. "They are hidden in the secret of God's presence." When near to him in prayer, they are hidden as in a pavilion, or a royal tent, protected by armed hosts, and furnished with the richest viands, [Psalm 27:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.5-6). But the full import of these terms cannot adequately be expressed. Who shall say what is implied in those words, "The secret of God's presence?" Who shall declare what a fullness of joy is there possessed by the believing suppliant? How powerless are the fiery darts which are hurled at him by the most envenomed foes, while God himself is a wall of fire round about him, and the glory of God irradiates his soul, inspiring it with a foretaste of Heaven itself!

Some little idea of his enjoyment may be formed from the history of Hezekiah at the time of Sennacherib's invasion. It was "a day of trouble, and of rebuke and blasphemy;" and the feelings excited in the bosom of Hezekiah were most distressing; but scarcely had he spread before the Lord the letter which the blaspheming Rabshakeh had sent him, than he was encouraged by God to return this triumphant answer, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, and laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you, [Isaiah 37:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.3); [Isaiah 37:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.14); [Isaiah 37:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.21-22)." Thus, like one who saw "the heavens filled with horses and chariots of fire" for his protection, he overlooked the vain boasts of his enemies, and anticipated a certain triumph.

Thus, however malignant the believer's enemies may be, he is hidden from them as in an impregnable fortress, and looks down on their fruitless efforts with pity and contempt!

ADDRESS.

1. Let us seek to attain the character of a godly man which is here drawn.

To fear God is the duty, and to trust in him the privilege, of every man! Learn then to tremble for fear of his judgments, and to rely on his mercy as revealed to you in his Gospel; for only then can you experience the blessings of his goodness, when you surrender up yourselves to him to be saved by his grace.

2. Let us enjoy the privileges conferred upon us.

For a fuller discovery of the believer's privileges, we may consult the declarations of David in the Psalms: [Psalm 91:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.1-4); [Psalm 91:9-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-16); [Psalm 55:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.21-22). Let us not rest in anything short of them. Let us get such a sense of them as shall overwhelm us with wonder, and gratitude, and praise!

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THE GODLY ENCOURAGED TO TRUST IN GOD

**[Psalm 31:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.21-24)**

"Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city. In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help. O love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD."

The use of biography is universally acknowledged. It leads us into the recesses of domestic life; and teaches us, either from the frailties or the excellencies of others, how to conduct ourselves in a great variety of emergencies, which we ourselves must expect to meet with in life.

But sacred biography is infinitely more interesting than that which proceeds only from uninspired pens, because the circumstances which are brought to light are more particular, more diversified, more authentic—than any records which people would choose to give of themselves, or than others would be capable of giving respecting them.

On this account the Psalms of David claim the highest possible regard. Perhaps there never was a man whose circumstances were more varied than his; and certainly there never was a man who committed to writing all the secret motions of his heart with more fidelity than he; or that labored more to improve them for the benefit of mankind.

This appears, as in many other Psalms, so especially in that before us; as will be clearly seen, while we notice:

I. David's acknowledgment of mercies conferred upon him.

To enter fully into this, we must refer to the occasion on which the Psalm was penned. It was written, I apprehend, after his deliverance from Saul, when, from his being surrounded by Saul's army, he had conceived it impossible for him to escape. Indeed, his deliverance was truly astonishing; and it was wrought by the special intervention of Almighty God, in answer to his prayer. At the very moment that his blood-thirsty persecutor had, to all appearance, effected his purpose, news came that the Philistines had invaded the land of Judah; and Saul was compelled to return instantly from his pursuit of David, in order to repel the invaders, [1 Samuel 23:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.27-28).

In reference to these circumstances, David first acknowledges the mercy in general terms, "Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city." And then he specifies more particularly the relief he had found in answer to prayer, when his own mind was overwhelmed with desponding fears.

In the peaceful state of the Church at this day, we are not likely to be reduced to David's state for our religion's sake; and, therefore, as far as the literal sense of the Psalm goes, it is not applicable to us. But, of deliverances equally "marvelous," we may speak. Let me then ask:

1. Whether you have not, at times, been ready to despond?

We can know but little either of our guilt or corruption, if we have not "had the sentence of death in ourselves, [2 Corinthians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.9)," and felt that we had "no sufficiency in ourselves" to save ourselves, 2 Corinthians 3:5. Have we never, then, under a sense of our extreme unworthiness and helplessness, been ready to doubt whether we could finally attain salvation, and "said, as it were, in our haste, I am cut off from before your eyes?" Go back to some particular seasons, when your great adversary has prevailed against you, and seemed as if, like a roaring lion, he would utterly destroy you; has it not, at such seasons, been difficult to lay hold on the divine promises, and to flee for refuge to the hope set before you?

2. Whether God has not at such seasons interposed for you, in answer to your prayer?

There are few that have not had reason to "bless and adore their God, for showing them his marvelous kindness in such seasons as these. The experience of the Prophet Jeremiah has been realized by God's people in every age, "The waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to be cut off. I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief." You came near when I called you, and you said, "Do not fear! [Lamentations 3:54-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.54-57)." From you, then, the Psalmist's acknowledgment is clue; and by you it should be made to the last hour of your lives.

Full of gratitude, David pours forth,

II. His exhortations, founded on his own experience.

1. David exhorts the saints to **love God**.

God is worthy to be loved for his own divine excellencies; but he should be loved also for the wisdom and goodness and equity of his dispensations.

"The faithful he does and will preserve;" yes, both from men and devils will he preserve them; he will "hide them under the shadow of his wings," and "keep them even as the apple of his eye."

But the ungodly, whoever he may be, he will plentifully repay with judgments proportioned to his impiety.

The ungodly may indeed triumph for a time, and the godly be left to groan under the rod of the oppressor; but a day of righteous retribution is at hand, when "God will recompense tribulation to those who trouble his people; and to those who are troubled, rest. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7."

Shall not the assurance of this be a comfort to the saints, even under their deepest troubles? Surely it should; so that I may well urge upon them the exhortation before us, "O love the Lord, all his saints."

2. David exhorts the saints to **trust in God**.

There are seasons when the saints can scarcely be said to believe and trust, while yet they do hope in God; saying, as it were, "If I perish, I will perish at his footstool, crying for mercy!" Now then, to all such people I say, "God will strengthen your heart," yes, and strengthen your arm too, so that "the arms of your hands shall be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, [Genesis 49:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.24)." He will even "perfect his own strength in your weakness," so that no enemy shall be able to prevail against you. "Be of good courage," then, my brethren. Though you cannot fully trust in God—yet, if you can hope in him, be not afraid; for God will vindicate your cause, and "bruise all your enemies, not excepting even Satan himself, under your feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

Exhortation.

1. Learn to see and to acknowledge the mercies of God towards you.

What loss is sustained, both of comfort to the saints, and of honor to God—by the inattention of men to the dispensations of their God! How many deliverances, both temporal and spiritual, have we all experienced; but of which, through our remissness, God has never received any tribute of praise! Know that if you will be observant of God's gracious dealings towards you, you will never lack a theme for gratitude and praise!

2. Never be satisfied with your own happiness, but seek to advance also the happiness of others.

David never celebrates any mercy given to him, without improving it as an occasion for commending God to others, and exhorting them to unite with him in every possible expression of love and gratitude.

Thus should it be with us also. We are not, indeed, called to make known to all the secret workings of our own hearts; but we are called to edify one another, and to take every suitable occasion of honoring our God. Let us, then, do this; and do it, too, with holy zeal. Let us "abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, that all his works may praise him, and all his saints may bless him! [Psalm 145:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.5-10)."

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TRUE BLESSEDNESS DECLARED

**[Psalm 32:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.1-6)**

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him."

To have the experience of David in all the diversified conditions of life faithfully submitted to us, is an advantage for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. There was scarcely any trouble, either of a temporal or spiritual nature, which he was not called to endure, and under which he has not stated to us the workings of his mind. We are accustomed to hear of his sins and his penitence, his sorrows and his joys.

But there is one particular frame of mind, in which he continued for many months, which we are apt, for the most part, to overlook, or to pass by with a mere transient observation; I mean, his state of impenitence and hardness of heart after the commission of his sin in the matter of Uriah. But this is an exceedingly profitable point of view in which to behold him, because of the general tendency of sin to harden the heart; and to see how he obtained peace at last is also of great advantage, inasmuch as it will show us how we may obtain peace, even after the commission of the greatest transgressions.

When David wrote this Psalm he had regained that blessed state from which he had fallen; and he here records, for the instruction of the Church in all future ages,

I. What true blessedness consists in.

A man who has no prospects beyond this present world, will seek happiness in the things of time and sense. But "a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses." We are immortal beings, and are hastening to a state, where a period will arrive, at which our present existence, even though it should have been continued a thousand years, will have been only as the twinkling of an eye.

In that state either blessedness or misery awaits us, according as we enter upon it under the guilt of our former sins, or with our sins forgiven. We may justly say, therefore, that true blessedness consists, as our text informs us, in having our sins forgiven.

To elucidate this topic, let us consider the blessing here spoken of:

1. As a non-imputation of sin.

Who that is in the smallest degree conscious of the number and heinousness of his transgressions, and of the awful punishment due to him on account of them, must not regard it as an unspeakable mercy to have them all blotted out from the book of God's remembrance? What in the whole universe can in his estimation be compared with this? If he could possess the world, yes, if he could possess ten thousand worlds—what comfort would the acquisition give him, if he had the melancholy prospect of being speedily plunged into the bottomless abyss of Hell?

If there were a large company of condemned criminals, some rich and noble, others poor and ignoble, and one of the lowest of them had received the king's pardon while all the rest were left for execution; who among them would be accounted the happiest?

How much more then, when the death to which unpardoned sinners are consigned is an everlasting death in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!

No one who reads the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and sees the termination of their respective states, can for a moment hesitate to pronounce Lazarus, with all his miseries and privations, far happier in a sense of reconciliation with his God; than the rich worldling in the enjoyment of all his pomp and luxury!

2. As a positive imputation of Jesus' righteousness.

In the words of David we should not have seen the doctrine of imputed righteousness, if Paul had not expressly told us that that doctrine was contained in them. He tells us in [Romans 4:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.6-8), that in these words "David describes the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputes righteousness without works, saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

Now this idea goes much farther than mere forgiveness; forgiveness exempts from punishment; but an imputation of the Redeemer's righteousness to us insures to us an eternal blessedness in glory! 2 Corinthians 5:21. O how blessed must that man be who is clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and can, on the footing of that righteousness, claim all the glory and felicity of Heaven! He may look forward to death and judgment, not only without fear but with holy confidence and joy, assured, that in God's sight he stands "without spot or blemish."

Who, we would ask, can be blessed, like the man who has been begotten to a living hope, that in and through Christ, there is reserved for him an incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading inheritance in Heaven?

3. As a renovation of soul consequent on reconciliation with God.

Sin is pardoned, and righteousness is imputed, purely through the free grace of God to the chief of sinners, without any good works performed by them. Mark the expressions, "the ungodly," "without works," [Romans 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.5-6)—yet no pardoned sinner is left in an unholy state; on the contrary, he is "renewed in the spirit of his mind;" "a new heart is given unto him;" and he is made "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." If this were not the case, pardon itself could not make him happy. A soul under the dominion of sin could not be happy, even if it were in Heaven; sin would eat at his vitals, as does a canker. It is the restoration of the soul to the Divine image that constitutes a very principal part of its felicity; for when we are "holy, as God is holy," then we are happy, as God is happy.

We must be careful however not to confound those different sources of blessedness. Paul was so jealous on this head, that when quoting the words of our text, be omitted these at the close of it, lest anyone should imagine that our sanctification were in any respect the ground of our justification before God. Sanctification is the fruit and consequence of our having received a justifying righteousness; and, though it in no respect procures our reconciliation with God in the first instance, (for that is procured solely through faith in Christ,) yet it is as inseparably connected with justifying faith, as good fruit is with a good tree; nor can the soul be blessed in a sense of the Divine favor, until it has this evidence of its acceptance with him.

But David proceeds to inform us,

II. How he himself attained unto blessedness.

For a long time he was altogether destitute of blessedness.

Partly through stoutness of heart, and partly through unbelief, he for a long time refused to humble himself for his heinous iniquities. But was he happy during that period? Hear his own representation of his state and feelings, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer."

The state of an impenitent sinner is fitly compared to the troubled sea, which cannot rest, but incessantly casts up mire and dirt. "There is no peace, says God, to the wicked."

We have a striking elucidation of this point in the history of Judas and of Peter. Both of them had sinned grievously; but Peter, through the influence of faith, repented; while Judas, under the influence of unbelief, sought refuge in suicide from the accusations of his own mind.

Thus it is with many who are haunted with a sense of guilt, but will not abase themselves before God; they "roar all the day long;" and "howl upon their beds, like dogs; but they do not cry unto God from their inmost souls, [Hosea 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.14)." Hence they can find no rest, or peace; and often precipitate themselves into the torments of Hell, to get rid of the torments of a guilty conscience. Ignorant people impute this despairing state to religion; but it is the lack of religion that produces this despair! It is the lack of true contrition that causes their guilt so to prey upon their minds. "God's hand is heavy upon them," because they will not humble themselves before him; and the longer they continue to defy God, the more may they expect to feel the pressure of his righteous indignation See [Psalm 38:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-8); [Psalm 102:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.3-7).

At last through penitence, David attained this blessed state.

"He at last acknowledged his sin, and confessed his transgressions unto the Lord;" and then God, who delights in mercy, spoke peace unto his soul. The transition was indeed surprisingly rapid, for he only said, "I will confess my transgressions," and instantly God forgave the iniquity of his sin! See [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13)." Doubtless God saw the sincerity of his heart; he not only saw that David mourned over his past offences, but was determined through grace to give himself up wholly and unreservedly to the Lord; and therefore he would not delay to restore to him the light of his countenance, and the joy of his salvation.

We have a beautiful instance of this rich display of mercy in the parable of the Prodigal Son; as also in the converts on the day of Pentecost; and in the jailer, [Acts 16:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.34). And similar displays of mercy may we ourselves hope for, if only we humble ourselves before him, and seek to be clothed in the Redeemer's righteousness; for "he is rich in mercy unto all who call upon him!"

Having stated thus his own experience, David proceeds to tell us,

III. What **improvement** we should make of it.

Unspeakably encouraging is the record here given to us. We should take occasion from it:

1. To seek the Lord for ourselves.

"The godly" will make their prayer unto God; and the ungodly also should do it. If any man ever had reason to despair, David had, after having so grievously departed from his God. But he cried unto the Lord, and obtained mercy at his hands.

Shall the ungodly then say, "My sins are too great to be pardoned?" Or shall "the godly," after the most horrible backslidings, sit down in despair, and say, "There is no hope?" No; the example of David absolutely forbids this. At the same time it shows the folly of delaying repentance; for there is no peace to the soul in an impenitent state; neither here nor hereafter can we be happy in any other way than that which God has marked out for us.

If penitential sorrow if painful, it never corrodes like impenitent obduracy; there is in it a melting of soul that participates of the nature of holy joy; and, if "weeping endures for a night, then joy is sure to come in the morning." If then we would be truly blessed, let us flee to Christ as the Refuge set before us; he is "the Lord our Righteousness;" and the vilest sinner upon earth shall find his "blood able to cleanse from all sin," and his righteousness sufficient to clothe our souls, so that the "shame of our nakedness shall never appear." But let us take care,

2. To seek him while he may be found.

There is "a time wherein he may be found" by every one of us; and a time wherein he may not be found. This is a solemn truth; but it is attested by many passages of Holy Writ, "O that you had known, even you, at least in this your day—the things that belong unto your peace!" said our Lord to Jerusalem, "but now they are hidden from your eyes!" God may, and does, "give over many to a reprobate mind," and to final impenitence, "So I gave them up."

But if you have the least desire of mercy, we are warranted to say, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." O then improve the present hour, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near." "If you cover your sins, you cannot prosper; but if you confess and forsake them, you shall find mercy." "If you say that you have no sin—then you deceive yourselves; but if you confess your sins—then he is faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

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JOY IN THE LORD INCULCATED

**[Psalm 32:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.11)**

"Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"

There is in this world, as there will also be in the eternal state, an inconceivable distance between the righteous and the wicked. The Psalmist tells us, that "many sorrows shall be to the wicked;" and so we find it to be, from universal experience. For, where is there an ungodly man:

Who does not feel within him an aching void, which the world can never fill?

Whose mind is not agitated with tormenting passions, which prove a source of disquiet both to himself and to those around him?

Who feels not a consciousness of unpardoned guilt; and a dread of that tribunal, before which he is shortly to appear?

On the other hand, the Psalmist assures us, that "the man who trusts in the Lord is encompassed with mercy all around;" he is blessed:  
in the favor of his God,  
in the subjugation of his passions,  
in the exercise of all holy affections,  
and in the prospect of everlasting felicity.

Hence he adds, "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"

That we may enter into the spirit of his words, I will endeavor to set before you,

I. The character here addressed.

"The righteous" are delineated in the Scriptures, sometimes by one mark, and sometimes by another mark. The character here assigned them is peculiarly worthy of our consideration, because it is such as the most ungodly man upon earth must, in theory at least, approve. The world unites in applauding integrity, as exercised towards man; but here we shall be led to view it as exercised towards God.

Now, "the upright" man is one:

1. Whose **desire** after God is supreme.

Nothing ought to stand in competition with God; we should love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. More especially should we pant after God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, "counting all things but loss for the knowledge of him!" and saying, with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside you! [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8). [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)."

2. Whose **trust** in God is undivided.

No man, who has not been taught of God, can conceive how difficult it is to divest ourselves of self-righteousness and self-dependence. These evils cleave more closely to us than the flesh to our bones! When we think that we are freed from them, we shall still find the workings of them in our hearts. But the truly upright person "renounces all confidence in the flesh, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3);" and, like the Apostle, "desires to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ." He considers "all fullness as treasured up in Him" for the use of his people; and from His fullness he desires to receive all the supplies which he stands in need of, whether of "wisdom, or righteousness, or sanctification, or redemption."

3. Whose **devotion** to God is unreserved.

The upright has given up himself as a living sacrifice to Christ, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). He would not have any lust unmortified; nor would he retain anything that would stand in competition with his duty to Jesus. Even life itself is regarded as of no value, in comparison with Christ, and the glory of his name.

Anything less than this is hypocrisy; but to possess these marks of an upright man is to be "an Israelite indeed, and without deceit."

To these people I will now address,

II. The exhortation.

To rejoice in the Lord is your high privilege. Let me, then, exhort you to rejoice in Him:

1. On account of what God has **already done for you**.

Here I might speak of "the sorrows" from which you are delivered, and of the mercies with which you are encompassed; but I will rather confine myself to that peculiar blessing given to you, the being made "upright before God."

Who among men has ever attained this character by any power of his own? None! Whoever possesses it, must say, "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose, [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5)."

Consider, then, how great a blessing this is! In comparison with it, crowns and kingdoms would be of no value. For this gift, therefore, you should praise and adore your God with your whole hearts, yes, and shout for joy with your whole souls.

2. On account of what God has **engaged to do for you**.

Would you have stability in life? He has promised it in his blessed word, "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he who has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger! [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9).

Would you have peace in death? This, also, he has engaged to give, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace! [Psalm 37:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.37)."

Would you have glory in eternity? This, also, shall be your assured portion at the right hand of God! [Psalm 15:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 15.1-2); [Psalm 24:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 24.3-6).

Is not here, then, abundant cause for joy and thanksgiving? Truly, "if you hold your peace, the very stones will cry out against you."

3. On account of God's sufficiency to fulfill all his engagements.

Whom has Jesus ever allowed "to be plucked out of his hands?"; There is in him no lack of power, "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy!" Nor is he changeable in will; for "he is the same yesterday, today, and forever." "Of those whom the Father has given him, he never has lost any," nor ever will.

Address,

1. To those who do **not** possess this character, I would say: Seek to attain it!

Do not be satisfied with integrity towards man, but seek to have an upright heart towards God. Let there be no hypocrisy harbored within you. See to it:

that your desire after God is really supreme;

that your trust in Christ be altogether unmixed with any measure of hope or confidence in yourselves;

and that your devotion to him be without reserve.

Cease not, until you have in your own hearts and consciences an evidence that you are thus given up to God; and then may you claim at his hands, the blessings which he has promised to the upright in heart, [Psalm 112:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.2).

But do not deceive your own souls. Rest not in false appearances of any kind; but beg of God to make you altogether what he himself will approve.

2. To those who possess this character, I would say: Live in the enjoyment of your privilege.

It is your privilege to "rejoice even with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Do not be satisfied with a low and drooping state of mind. Live near to God, and let your fellowship with him be more intimate and more abiding. It is not his will that your graces should languish, or your joys be at a low ebb. He would rather that your soul, through a sense of his presence, should be ever shouting for joy!

See the state of the Church as drawn by the prophet, Isaiah [Isaiah 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.4-6); see it as drawn by David also, [Psalm 98:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 98.4-9); and let your present life be, as God would have it, a pledge and a foretaste of the heavenly bliss!

#549

GOD'S CARE OF HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 33:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.18-22)**

"Behold! The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you."

In the Psalms of David, we do not look so much for the peculiarities of the Gospel, as for general views of God's providence and grace. But do not under-valuate the Scriptures on that account; for the very use of evangelical truth is to bring us into a state of reconciliation with God, that we may have a richer and more intimate enjoyment of him in all his dispensations toward us.

The words before us declare the interest which God takes in his peculiar people; and, in unfolding them to your view, I will endeavor to show:

I. God's care for his people.

The manner in which our attention is called to this subject clearly shows the vast importance of it, "Behold! The eye of the Lord is on those who fear him."

Two things in particular we are here called to notice:

1. The **description** given of God's redeemed people.

Never can we sufficiently admire the goodness of God in giving to us such descriptions of his people as will enable every upright soul to discern his own character, and to number himself among them. Were they designated by such terms as would comprehend only those of higher spiritual attainments, the less spiritual among them would be driven to despair. But when, as in the text, the lowest terms are used, even such as mark the very babes in Christ, every member of Gods family is encouraged, and emboldened to claim the privileges to which a relationship to God entitles him.

There is not in God's family "a new-born babe" who does not "fear" him.

All of God's redeemed family regard him as a mighty Sovereign, whom they are bound to obey.

All desire to serve him, and greatly dread his displeasure.

All account his favor as their supreme felicity.

All desire so to approve themselves to him, that they may be accepted by him in the last day.

Yet, it is not on their good dispositions that they found their hopes, and much less on their actual attainments. They are sensible of their short-comings and defects, even in their very best duties; and are conscious, that, if God were to enter into judgment with them on the footing of strict justice, they must inevitably and eternally perish. They therefore renounce, utterly, all claims upon the justice of God, and "hope altogether in his mercy," in his mercy as revealed to them in the Gospel.

"Behold," now, you who are of a doubtful or desponding mind; Are you not ready to leap for joy, when you find that people of these low spiritual attainments may claim relationship to God, and assure themselves that they are savingly interested in his paternal care?

2. The **particular interest**which God takes in his redeemed people.

His eye is over them at all times! It is over the whole creation indeed, as we are told in the preceding context, "The Lord looks from Heaven; he beholds all the sons of men; from the place of his habitation he looks upon all the inhabitants of the earth, verse 13, 14." But on his redeemed people his eye is fixed with a more especial interest; namely, " to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine!" Or, in other words, to preserve them from all dangers, and to supply their every need.

In relation both to their souls and bodies, they are exposed to continual and most imminent dangers:

Disease or accident may at any moment consign them over to the grave.

Satan, that roaring lion, goes about seeking daily and hourly to devour their souls.

On every side the world also assaults them with its temptations.

While their own inbred corruptions are ever watching for an opportunity to betray them into the hands of their great Adversary.

But God's eye is ever over them, to counteract the devices of their enemies, and to uphold them in his everlasting arms. He will never allow one of them to "be plucked out of his hands."

Their needs too, whether temporal or spiritual, he will supply. He may allow them to be reduced to great straits, even as Israel was, when they had come out of Egypt. But sooner shall manna be given them from the clouds, and water from the rock, than they be left to perish; for his express promise to them is, that provision shall accompany his protection; and that, while "their place of defense is the munition of rocks, bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure, [Isaiah 33:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.16)." "While they seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all needful things, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature, shall surely be added unto them! [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33)."

But, before you take to yourselves the full comfort of these declarations, it will be proper for me yet further to show:

II. What your feelings towards God should be.

The truly upright, even of the lowest class, can say, with David, "We wait in hope for the LORD." If you are indeed of the number of his people, then:

1. You wait upon God in a way of **humble trust**.

The language of your heart is, "He is our help and our shield!" But is it thus indeed? Are you going to him from day to day, as sinners who stand in need of mercy? and are you crying to him continually for "grace to help you in every time of need?"

I do not ask whether you are free from assaults; but, whether they drive you to him for aid? It is supposed that you have enemies to conflict with, and trials to sustain; else you would not need to be looking out for a shield to protect, or for help to support, you. But do you so realize the watchful care of God, as to renounce all hope in the creature, and to rely on him alone for all your needs? If you truly "fear him," and truly "hope in his mercy," you cannot but make him your refuge, and commit to him your every care!

2. You wait upon God in a way of **confident expectation**.

The Psalmist, having such a Protector and such a Helper, anticipates a successful outcome to all his trials; and declares, that the very trust which he reposes in God is at once the ground and measure of his expectations from God, "In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you." And shall this be thought too bold an assertion? It is not more bold than true; for God has repeatedly pledged his Word, that "none of those who trust in him shall be desolate, [Psalm 34:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.22)." Nay more, on every occasion we may consider him as saying to us, "According to your faith it shall be unto you, [Matthew 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.13); [Matthew 9:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.29)."

His conduct towards Abraham clearly shows us how he will act towards all who believe in him. Abraham is tried as never any man was; he is bidden to offer up in sacrifice his only son Isaac, in and through whom all the promises of God were to be fulfilled. The holy man proceeds to execute the divine command, assured, that though Isaac were already reduced to ashes on an altar, God both could, and would, raise him up again, and fulfill in him all that he had promised. Accordingly, Isaac was given to him, as it were, from the dead; and was made the instrument of raising up to Abraham that "seed, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed."

Just so, in proportion as our expectations are enlarged, shall be God's exertions in our favor. If only we can say with David, "Truly my soul waits upon God; from him comes my salvation; He only is my rock, and my salvation, and defense;" then we may, with assured confidence, add with him, "I shall not be moved! [Psalm 62:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.1-2); [Psalm 62:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.5-6)."

And now let me ask,

1. What **evidence** have you that you are the Lord's?

Do you answer to the character here given of his people, "fearing him" above all, and "hoping in his mercy" alone? Do you evince that that is indeed your character, by waiting upon him continually, and expecting at his hands his offered benefits? Examine well the habit of your minds from day to day; for it is of such only that it can be said, His eye is "over them for good! [Deuteronomy 30:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.9)."

But far different is the state of those who fear him not; for "the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth! [Psalm 34:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.15-16)."

I again say, and rejoice to say, that, though your attainments reach no further than holy fear and humble hope—the Lord will look upon you with tender and paternal love; but, if these graces are not rooted in your hearts—then you have yet to learn what it is to receive the grace of God in truth.

2. What would be your state, if God's mercy to you should be measured by your regards for him?

 The apostle John prayed for Gaius, that "his bodily health might prosper, as his soul prospered, 3 John, verse 2." And are you prepared to pray with David, "Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon me, according as my hope is in you!" Truly, were this God's rule of acting towards us all, the greater part of us would never taste of his mercy to all eternity. But, thanks he to God! he is sovereign in the exercise of his mercy, being "often found by those who sought him not, and made known to those who inquired not after him."

Yet let us not presume on this; for, if he shows mercy to any, he will assuredly bring them to the state described in our text, and both put his "fear in their hearts," and "make them to abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

#550

DEVOTION EXEMPLIFIED

**[Psalm 34:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.1-3)**

"I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together!"

A sense of gratitude to God for his mercies will ever abide in some measure on the soul of a true believer. But there are special occasions whereon he is so impressed with the Divine goodness, that he feels as if he never could forget it, and as if he would have the whole creation join with him in his devout acknowledgments. This was the frame of David's mind, when, by feigning himself mad, he had escaped out of the hands of Achish, who would probably have put him to death, or delivered him into the hands of Saul, his blood-thirsty persecutor. Compare [1 Samuel 21:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 21.10) to [1 Samuel 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 22.1), with the title of this Psalm.

In discoursing on David's words, we shall notice,

I. David's determination to praise God.

The **ungodly** love to boast about themselves.

Ungodly men love to boast about themselves. There is no unsaved man who has not some imaginary excellencies whereof to brag. If they possess any natural endowment either of mind or body, they are forward to bring it into notice, and to arrogate some praise to themselves on account of it.

One values herself upon her beauty,  
another boasts of his strength or courage,  
another prides himself in his wealth,  
another displays his wit, or mental acumen.

Rather than pass unnoticed, the ungodly will boast of their iniquities and excesses; yes, (strange to say!) of iniquities they have not committed, and of excesses to which they have never arrived.

The godly, on the other hand, "boast in the Lord".

They know, by bitter experience, that in themselves dwells no good thing. They have done nothing but what furnishes matter for the deepest humiliation. But they see in God multitudinous matters to excite their devoutest adoration. Whether they contemplate:  
the perfections of God's nature,  
or the works of his hands,  
or the wonders of his providence,  
or the riches of his grace—  
they are filled with wonder and astonishment; and, pouring contempt on all created excellencies, they exclaim, "Who is like You O God—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders!" [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11)

The Psalmist was the more induced to praise God in a public manner, from a consideration of:

II. The effect David hoped to produce by this means.

He did not expect any particular benefit to accrue to the **proud**.

The proud, alas! are disgusted with even the mention of God's name, provided it is with reverence and love; nor do they ever speak of him themselves, unless it is to profane his name in oaths and curses. Their aversion to hear of him increases according to the degree in which he is honored. They will allow us to speak somewhat of God as he is manifested in creation; but they do not like to be told of his sovereign love in redemption. They will bear to hear a little of God (though but little) in his works of providence; but they cannot endure to hear one syllable of his gloriously rich and sovereign grace. If we utter but a word expressive of admiration and love on account of his condescension in revealing himself to our souls, we forfeit at once all title to respectability, and become in their eyes the most contemptible of beings. They would be less offended with curses and blasphemies and the grossest obscenity, than with one such an expression of love to God.

But David hoped that to the **godly**, his adorations would afford matter of sincere joy.

The godly are not so free from pride, but that flattery sometimes finds access to their hearts, and proves a gratification to their unwary minds. But in their better seasons, when their airy dreams have vanished, and they obtain juster views of themselves, they most sincerely loath and abhor themselves, and desire that God alone should be exalted. To be told of their own goodness is nauseous and unpalatable; but to hear the praises of their God and Savior—this is delightful to their souls! It is this that endears to them the ministers of God; he who with the clearest evidence and richest unction exhibits to their view the glory and excellency of their God, will be regarded as their best friend; and every one who in sincerity labors to fulfill this office, will be "esteemed by them very highly in love for his work's sake."

To stir up within ourselves a similar disposition, let us consider,

III. David's exhortation to join with him in this blessed design.

David calls on all of us to unite with him in praising and adoring God; and his exhortation may well serve as an application to the foregoing subject. We ask then:

1. Is not extolling God a **reasonable** employment?

Let anyone call to mind the excellencies of God as they are described in Scripture, and then say whether it is not reasonable that we should exalt his name. But more particularly, let the wonders of redemption be surveyed (O wonders inexpressible, and surpassing all comprehension!); let the thought of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, becoming man, of his dying upon the cross, of his living again to make intercession for us in Heaven; let the thought of this being done to deliver our souls from damnation, and to restore us to the favor of our offended Father; let this, I say, dwell upon the mind, and we shall see at once the reasonableness of this duty, and the utter unreasonableness of passing one day or one hour without renewed expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving.

2. Is not extolling God a **delightful** employment?

Poor indeed is the mirth of this world, when compared with the joy of praising God. This is the work of all the glorified saints and angels, "they rest not day or night, saving, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty!"

And if this be the employment of Heaven, what must such an exercise be to us, but a Heaven upon earth? It is indeed a foretaste of Heaven, as all who have ever engaged in it are constrained to acknowledge; nor, if we were always thus engaged, would any trouble or sorrow be able to molest us; our very afflictions would rather give energy to our souls, and enlarge at once our subjects of praise, and our disposition to abound in it.

3. Is not extolling God a **necessary** employment?

It is grievous on such a subject as this to insinuate anything of an alarming nature; but, if men will not be "constrained by love," then we must endeavor to "persuade them by the terrors of the Lord."

God declared to his people of old, that, if they would not serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart for the abundance of all things which he had so liberally bestowed upon them, they would endure all the curses denounced in his law, [Deuteronomy 28:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.45); [Deuteronomy 28:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.47). With how much greater force does this threatening come to us, if we neglect to praise him for the infinitely greater benefits he has conferred on us! We ourselves feel indignant if great and acknowledged virtues is despised, or eminent favors are disregarded. And shall God ever look with delight on those who are blind to his excellencies, and insensible of his mercies? Whatever we may imagine to the contrary, none shall ever join the celestial choir above, whose hearts have not been tuned to sing God's praise below!

#551

GRATEFUL RECOLLECTIONS

**[Psalm 34:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.6)**

"This poor man cried; and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles!"

It is of great advantage to have transmitted to us the experience of God's saints; because in them we see exhibited, as it were, before our eyes, what we ourselves are authorized to expect. David, in this Psalm, records his deliverance from the hands of Achish, king of Gath; who, there was every reason to fear, would have either put him to death or delivered him into the hands of Saul, if God had not mercifully interposed to prevent it. As for the means which David had recourse to, in order to deceive Achish, I am not prepared either to justify or condemn them, [1 Samuel 21:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 21.13-15). To feign himself to be insane before Achish, was surely a very humiliating measure. But, whether it was strictly correct or not, God was pleased to make use of it for the deliverance of his faithful servant from the danger to which, by fleeing to Gath, he had exposed himself; and David, in this Psalm, commemorates this gracious interposition, and records it for the benefit of the Church in all future ages.

I. Let us consider the text as **a grateful acknowledgment**.

It is not necessary to confine our attention to the immediate occasion of the words, since David uses nearly the same expression in reference to mercies received during the rebellion of Absalom, [Psalm 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 3.3-4) with the title of that Psalm.

Throughout the whole of his life, **David** received marvelous mercies at the hands of God.

His temporal deliverances were great on numberless occasions, from the persecutions of Saul; the assaults of enemies; and the rebellion of Absalom; but from all his troubles God had saved him; and for this salvation he did well to offer to God his most grateful acknowledgments, [2 Samuel 22:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 22.1-7).

But what shall I say of the spiritual mercies given to him? These were beyond measure great, inasmuch as his terrors were sometimes of the most overwhelming nature, [Psalm 6:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.1-6); [Psalm 40:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.12); [Psalm 42:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.7); and his sins, of almost unparalleled enormity [Psalm 25:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.11). But from all of these had God delivered him, in answer to his prayers; and for these merciful interpositions he most humbly and most thankfully adores his God, [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3).

And have not **we** also innumerable mercies, both temporal and spiritual, to acknowledge?

True, in respect of temporal afflictions, none of us can bear any comparison with him. But still there are few of us who have not experienced some deliverances; and there is not one who has not reason to bless God, with all possible ardor, for his forbearance, at least, if not also for his pardoning love! Let us call to mind the various interpositions of our God in times of sickness, or trouble, or danger. But more especially, it ever we have cried to God under a sense of our sins, and an apprehension of God's wrath, and have obtained mercy at his hands, what thanks should we also render to him for such marvelous mercies! Methinks if we do not call upon all that is within us to bless his holy name, "the very stones will cry out against us."

But David intended these words to be considered, also,

II. Let us consider the text as **an instructive record**.

The whole preceding part of the Psalm shows that it was written by him with this view. "I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles! [Psalm 34:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.1-6)."

Behold, then, how plainly it instructs us:

1. That there are no troubles so great, but God is **able**to deliver us from them.

Neither our temporal nor our spiritual troubles can well exceed those of David; yet, if he was saved from his troubles, why may not we be saved from ours? "Has God's ear become heavy, that it cannot hear; or is his hand shortened, that he cannot save? [Isaiah 59:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.1)." We must on no account limit either the power or the mercy of our God; but "be strong in faith, giving glory to his name, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)."

2. That there are no troubles so great, but God **will deliver us from them in answer to our prayers**.

Who ever heard of any instance wherein God said to a man, "Seek my face in vain?" Jonah was heard from the bottom of the sea; and David, as it were, from the very gates of Hell. Manasseh, too, was heard, and accepted, after all his great and aggravated crimes! [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13). Let none, then, despond, whatever his trouble may be, or whatever his guilt may be; but let all be assured, that if their faith be only as a grain of mustard-seed, it shall prevail, to the casting of all the mountains, whether of difficulty, or of sin, into the very depths of the sea! [Matthew 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.20).

3. That answers to prayer, so far from puffing up a man with pride, will invariably humble and abase him.

Who is it that here designates himself by this humiliating appellation, "This poor man?" It is David, "the man after God's own heart." But did not God's mercies to him puff him up? Quite the reverse. He never was more humble than when most honored by his God. And so it was with Jacob in the Old Testament, [Genesis 32:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.10-11); and with the Apostle Paul in the New. If ever there was a man more highly honored than others, it was the Apostle Paul; yet he still continued to account himself "less than the least of all saints, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8)," yes, and as "the very chief of sinners, [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)." Just so will divine grace operate on us also. People imagine, that if we profess to have received special answers to prayer, and to have obtained the forgiveness of our sins, we must, of necessity, be elated with pride. But the very reverse of this was the effect produced on the minds of Job, and of the prophet Isaiah, who only loathed themselves the more in proportion as they were honored by their God, [Job 42:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5-6) and [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5); and thus it will be with every real saint; he will account himself "poor" even to his dying hour, and will be ever ready to "prefer others in honor before himself, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10). [Philippians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3)."

If, then, this retrospective view of God's mercies is so sweet on earth, then:

1. What must it be the very instant we arrive at the gates of Heaven!

At the moment of our departure from the body, we shall have a complete view of all God's dealings with us, whether in his providence or grace. And if here our partial views of these things fill us with such joy and gratitude—then what will a full discovery of them do? As to any undue elevation of mind, on account of the mercies given to us, it will produce a directly contrary effect; for all the glorified saints cast their crowns at the Savior's feet, and prostrate themselves before him, and sound no other name than his! [Revelation 5:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8-10).

And there they will have their salvation altogether complete! No further "trouble" to all eternity will they experience; for "all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes forever! [Revelation 7:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-17)." Oh! look forward to that day with holy delight; and let the foretastes of it, which you here enjoy, stimulate your exertions to honor God, and to obtain a fitness for the blessedness that awaits you.

2. How earnest should you be in commending to others the Redeemer who saved you!

The Psalmist sets the example for you, "Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me! [Psalm 66:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.16-20)." Thus must you do also.

Do not be content to go to Heaven alone. Tell to those around you the efficacy of prayer; and extol the Savior, as "able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him." Thus will you fulfill the design of David in transmitting his experience to future ages; while you confirm his testimony, by your acknowledgment that God is still as gracious as ever, and an unchangeable Friend to all who come to him in his Son's name

#552

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION ENFORCED

**[Psalm 34:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.8)**

"Taste and see that the Lord is good!  
 Blessed is the man who trusts in him!"

There is, in the minds of many, a prejudice against experimental religion, insomuch that the very name of Christian experience is an object of reproach.

But, what is repentance, but a sense of sorrow on account of sin?

And what is faith, but a resting of the soul on God's promised mercy in Christ?

And what is love, but a going forth of the soul in kindly affections towards God and man?

The heart is the proper seat of genuine religion, "My son," says God, "give me your heart;" and, to imagine that we can have hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, excited in the soul—and yet not possess any consciousness of such feelings, is a mere delusion.

I do not mean to decry those exercises of the mind which are purely intellectual; for they are necessary in their place. But it is not in mere intellectual pursuits that genuine piety consists; they may lay the foundation for piety; but there must be a superstructure of holy affections, before the edifice of genuine piety can be complete.

This is intimated in the words before us; in which it will be proper to notice,

I. The experience recommended.

That "the Lord is good," will admit of no doubt.

This is seen throughout all the works of Creation; every one of which bears the stamp and character of wisdom and love.

Nor is the goodness of God less visible in the dispensations of Providence; for, though we see them very partially, and are constrained to wait the outcome of events in order to form a correct judgment respecting them—yet, from what we have seen, who can but acknowledge that "God is good to all, and that his tender mercy is over all his works?"

But most of all God's goodness appears in the great mystery of redemption. Who can reflect on that stupendous act of mercy, the giving of his only-begotten Son to die for us, and to bear our sins in his own body on the tree? Who can reflect on the sending of his Holy Spirit to instruct and sanctify us, and on the providing for his people an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and never-fading, reserved for them in Heaven? Who, I say, can take ever so slight a survey of these wonders, and not say with the Psalmist, "O how great is your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear you; which you have wrought for those who trust in you before the sons of men, [Psalm 31:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.19).

Let us, then, "**taste** and see how good the Lord is".

A man who had been immured all his days in a dungeon would have no conception of the radiance of the sun, in comparison with that which he would acquire by being subjected to the action of its meridian rays; nor will a person who has merely heard, and read of God's goodness be able to form an estimate of it, in comparison with what he would after having had "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit."

In the one state he might say, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear;" but, on his transition from it, he might add, "Now my eye sees you!" This is what I would wish respecting you; I would wish all "the goodness of God to pass before you," if not in visible splendor and in audible sounds—yet in a way perceptible to the organs of faith.

But how is this to be attained? I answer: As Moses was put into the cleft of the rock, that he might be capable of sustaining the manifestations of God's glory, [Exodus 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-19)—so you must "be found in Christ;" and then you shall behold all "the glory of God shining forth in his face!"

That we may be stirred up to seek this experience, let us notice,

II. The blessedness resulting from an experimental **tasting**of the goodness of God.

A just view of God's goodness will lead us to **trust** in him.

"Those who know your name," says David, "will put their trust in you," They will go to him with:  
all their guilt to be pardoned,  
and all their corruptions to be mortified,  
and all their needs to be supplied.

Those who know him not, are ever prone to limit either his power or his willingness to save; but those who have "tasted how gracious he is, [1 Peter 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.3)," will commit to him their every concern, and trust him for body and for soul, for time and for eternity.

And need I ask, whether people so doing shall be "blessed?"

Truly it is not in the power of language to declare the full extent of their blessedness. What tranquility possesses their minds! It is well said, that "their peace surpasses understanding," and their "joy is unspeakable and full of glory."

As conscious as they are of their ill-desert—they nevertheless feel assured of mercy through the blood of sprinkling.

As sensible as they are of a "body of sin and death," and almost sinking under its weight—they yet can say, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Knowing by bitter experience, also, the power and subtlety of Satan, they yet anticipate a final victory over him, and doubt not but that he shall soon be forever "bruised under their feet."

As for death, they have learned to number it among their treasures, [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22); and they look forward to a habitation infinitely better than any that this world can afford, even to "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

In every view that can be conceived, these people are blessed; as indeed the whole Scripture testifies; but more especially does David assure us of it, when, in a solemn appeal to God himself, he says, "O Lord God Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you! [Psalm 84:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.12)."

ADDRESS.

Are there any among you who doubt the blessedness of true religion?

I am sure that you have never have had any just experience of it. And what would you yourselves say to anyone who should presume, under such circumstances, to judge of earthly things? Would you not reply, you are incompetent to judge, for you never tasted of the matter? So, then, I say to you, Go first and taste whether God is good to those who seek him. If you can truly say:  
that you have sought him with deep penitential sorrow, and he has shut up his affections of compassion from you;  
that you have prostrated yourselves at the foot of the cross, and the Lord Jesus has spurned you from his foot-stool;  
and that you have truly and unreservedly given yourselves up to God, and he has denied you the assistance of his grace;  
that, while you have thus turned with your whole heart to God, and retained no allowed sin within you, God has cast out your prayer, and refused to be gracious unto you  
—only then I will allow you to be judges in this matter.

But where is the man that will dare to stand up and say to the Lord Jesus Christ, 'You have declared that you would "on no account cast out any who came to you;" but you have falsified your word in reference to me, and allowed me to seek your face in vain?' No! There never yet existed an occasion for such a reproach, nor ever shall, as long as the world shall stand.

I say, then, that those who doubt the blessedness of true religion are in darkness even to this very hour, and "speak evil of the things which they understand not." And, if they pretend that they have endeavored to taste whether God were good, and found him not to be so—then I hesitate not to say, that the fault has not been in God, but in themselves, in that their taste has been vitiated, and their souls rendered incapable of spiritual discernment.

To those who have "**tasted**that the Lord is gracious,"

I would say, Do not be satisfied with a taste. God invites you to "eat and drink abundantly! [Song of Solomon 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.1)," until you are even "satisfied with his goodness, [Jeremiah 31:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.14)." Such is your privilege, as David has declared, "How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God! Therefore shall the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings; they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house; and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures! [Psalm 36:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.7-8)."

And be careful that you do not become "weary of the Lord." We read of some, who, having "tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and having tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come—yet so fell away, as never to be renewed unto repentance, [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6)." Beware, lest that ever befit your state. Beware, lest you so "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

If men who have never tasted of his grace commit iniquity, they bring no particular disgrace upon religion. But if you, who profess godliness, openly sin—then you cast a stumbling-block before the world; who conclude, from what they see in you, that there is not a sufficiency of love in Christ to make you blessed, or of grace to make you holy. I beg you—bring not such dishonor upon him, or such guilt upon your own souls; but so "acquaint yourselves with him, that you may be at peace;" and so delight yourselves in him, that "your souls may be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, while you are praising him with joyful lips! [Psalm 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.5)."

#553

THE FEAR OF GOD INCULCATED

**[Psalm 34:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.11-16)**

"Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth."

To enlighten a dark world, and to guide wanderers into the paths of peace and holiness—is the most glorious office that can be committed to a human being!

So at least David thought; for though he was well qualified to teach men the science of music (in which he eminently excelled), or the art of war (in which he was a great proficient), or the principles by which states and kingdoms should be governed, he considered none of those employments comparable to that of instructing men in the principles and practice of true religion. As a prophet of the Lord, (for at the time the Psalm was written, he was not yet exalted to the throne of Israel,) he regarded all, to whom he had access, as his children; and was anxious, as a loving parent, to gain their attention, that he might instill into their minds those truths which he himself felt to be of supreme importance. He wished in particular to show them, what we also are desirous to point out to you:

I. Wherein the fear of the Lord consists.

The fear of the Lord is such a reverential regard to him as inclines us to walk in all things according to his revealed will, and to approve ourselves to him:

1. In our **words**.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak;" and every evil that is in the heart will betray itself by the tongue. Truly the tongue is justly called an unruly member; like a helm of a ship, it is but a small matter; but it boasts great things. It is declared by God himself to be "a world of iniquity," "a fire, setting in flames the course of nature, and itself set on fire by Hell." So untameable is it, that the man who bridles it on all occasions is pronounced to be "a perfect man;" while, on the other hand, the man who has no command over it, however religious he may imagine himself, or be thought by others—is a self-deceiver, whose religion is vain! See [James 3:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2-8).

It is therefore with great propriety that David specifies the control of the tongue as the first evidence of the fear of God, "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies."

Not only must all profane talk and all impure communications be forborne, but everything that is false and deceitful, or corrupt in any way whatever. Every proud, angry, passionate, revengeful word must be suppressed, whatever may be the provocation to utter it. All calumny, detraction, uncharitableness, tale-bearing, must be avoided, and "the law of truth and of kindness be continually on the lips." God has said, that "of every idle word we must give account in the day of judgment," and that "by our words we shall be either justified or condemned;" and therefore the fear of the Lord must of necessity cause us to "take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongue."

2. In our **actions**.

Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates;" and it should be universally and irreconcilably hated by us, "We must depart from evil, and do good." Whatever evil we may have been most tempted, and most accustomed, to commit—that is the evil against which we must most watchfully guard, and from which we must most resolutely depart.

On the other hand, we must be occupied in doing good. The doing of good should be the great business of life; first, the doing good to our own household; then to all our neighbors; then to the Church of God at large. The devising of good, and the executing of good, and the uniting with others in the good devised by them, and the stirring up all around us to do good according to their opportunities and ability. This is a life worthy of a Christian, and necessarily flowing from the fear of God. If we truly fear God, we shall "abhor that which is evil, and cleave (be glued) to that which is good," and "be fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God!"

3. In our whole **temperament**.

A peaceful, loving spirit will characterize every child of God. "God is love;" and all his children will resemble him in this glorious attribute. True it is, that it is not always possible to be at peace, because some are so wicked and unreasonable that they will take occasion even from our very peacefulness, to injure us the more. Hence Paul says, "If it is possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men." Whether we succeed or not, our constant aim and effort must be for peace. For the preservation of it we should account no sacrifice too great; and we should be as studious to promote it among others, as to preserve it with ourselves. If we see an unkind spirit prevailing any where, we should endeavor to extinguish the fire, and not, by countenancing it, add fuel to the flame. The evil of contention is so great that no one who possesses heavenly wisdom will engage in it Himself, or encourage it in others, [James 3:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.13-18). If we fear the Lord indeed, our constant labor will be to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

While explaining thus wherein the fear of the Lord consists, the Psalmist points out,

II. The importance of cultivating the fear of God in our own hearts.

As for those who had no concern about their souls, David did not expect them to hearken to such self-denying lessons as he endeavored to inculcate; but to those who desired true blessedness in this world and the next, he gave the advice which we have already considered, verse 12. To enforce his advice, he assured them of,

1. God's favor to those who fear him.

"The eyes of the Lord," says he, "are upon the righteous, and his ear is open to their cry." Not a moment are they out of his sight, nor for a moment is he inattentive to their prayers.

Are they in danger? He will protect them, and cause his angel to encamp around them, that no enemy may approach to hurt them, verse 7.

Are they in need? He will supply them with all that is needful for them. "The lions that could prey upon them shall want and suffer hunger; but they shall lack nothing that is good," for body or for soul, for time or for eternity! verse 9, 10.

Are they in trouble? He will assuredly in due time interpose to deliver them. They may have many troubles; but he will deliver them from all, the very instant they have accomplished their destined office, verse 17, 19. He sends the trials needed to purify them from their dross; and he sits by the furnace, ready to bring them out, in the proper season, "purified as gold."

Are they longing for his presence here, and his glory hereafter? He will "be near unto their souls" in this world, and will save them in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation in the world to come! verse 18.

In a word, there shall be an infinite distance between them and others; for they shall enjoy all the richest blessings of redemption, while those who cast off the fear of God shall be left inconsolably and forever desolate! verse 21, 22. What inducements are here to seek that holy disposition of mind inculcated in our text!

2. God's indignation against those who do not fear him.

God does not merely withhold his blessings from the ungodly, but actually becomes their enemy. He does not only turn his face from them, but sets his face against them, "he walks contrary to those who thus walk contrary to him." Hear how indignantly he speaks to those who profess to reverence him, but in fact dishonor him by their conduct, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not obey the things which I say? [Luke 6:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.46)." Yes, he declares that whatever profession of religion they may make, they shall never enter into his kingdom, "Not every one who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom or Heaven, but he who obeys the will of my Father who is in Heaven [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21)." He intimates, that in the day of judgment there will be many who will confidently claim Heaven, as it were, on account of their zeal and success in his service; but that, forasmuch as they were destitute of all these holy dispositions, he will not acknowledge them as his, but bid them to depart accursed into everlasting fire! [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23). In a word, God declares that by their fruits only shall they be known either in this world or the next, [Matthew 7:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.18-20).

It must however be remembered, that though the exercise of these holy dispositions is pleasing and acceptable to God—it is not meritorious in itself; nor can it found a claim for our justification before God. A reward, it is true, will be given us; but it is "a reward of grace, and not of debt." It is in Christ only that we can have a justifying righteousness; nevertheless our works will be regarded as the evidences of our faith; if our faith operates in the way above mentioned, we shall be acknowledged as Christ's redeemed people; but if it does not, it will be considered as dead; and we shall be cast out as hypocrites and self-deceivers!

Now allow a word of exhortation.

1. We entreat of you to labor for practical piety.

There are many professors of religion who love to hear of the privileges of the Lord's people, but not to hear of their duties. They call such duties, legal—but they neither understand what legality is, nor what the Gospel is. Legalism is a leaning, either in whole or in part, to the works of the law to justify us before God; and if we encouraged that, we might justly be regarded as abandoning and subverting the Gospel of Christ! But, when we teach people to fear the Lord, and, from a desire to please Christ, and from a dread of his displeasure, to approve themselves to God in the whole of their life and conduct—we do only what the Apostles of our Lord also did; for Peter quotes the very words of our text in the precise way in which we have insisted upon them, [1 Peter 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.10-12); and therefore we are sure that an attention to them befits us under the Gospel.

We further say, that the people who set themselves up for judges in this way, are ignorant also of the Gospel. The Gospel consists of two parts, doctrine and practice, just as a house consists of a foundation and a superstructure. But who would choose a place for his habitation that has a foundation indeed, but neither walls nor roof? Or who would call such a structure a house? So doctrines, however sound, will not answer the ends of the Gospel. Nor can mere doctrines be properly called the Gospel, unless they stand connected with good works as issuing from them, and built upon them.

The doctrines are the foundation; the good works are the superstructure; and then only are the doctrines available for our salvation, when they operate to the production of universal holiness. This is the account which our blessed Lord himself gives of his Gospel; and he alone is truly wise, who embraces and builds upon it in this view, [Matthew 7:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.24-27).

2. We entreat of you to cultivate a child-like spirit.

We have addressed you as "children;" though there may be many present who are "young men and fathers," yet must we say, that an advance towards Christian maturity will always be manifested by a proportionate growth in humility. Our blessed Lord told his Apostles, that whoever among them most fully attained the tempers and dispositions of a "little child—the same would be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven." Let your growth then be seen in this way; then, whatever is taught to you, it will be "received with meekness, as an engrafted word, able and effectual to save your souls." Indeed without this humility of mind no man can have that "honest and good heart," which alone will nourish the seed that is sown in it, and enable it to "bring forth fruit unto perfection."

To those who are really young in age, a teachable spirit is indispensable to their improvement. O let such listen to the voice of their teachers with humility and gratitude! Let them especially also look unto the Holy Spirit of God, to apply the Word unto their hearts; and let them "not be hearers only of the Gospel, but doers of it also," lest the privileges they enjoy lead only to the deceiving and ruining of their own souls!

#554

THE BROKEN AND CONTRITE IN HEART ENCOURAGED

**[Psalm 34:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.18)**

"The Lord is near unto those who are of a broken heart; and saves such as are of a contrite spirit."

The objects of God's favor are very frequently designated by the exalted title of "The righteous;" "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous;" "Many are the afflictions of the righteous;" "Those who hate the righteous shall be desolate, verses 19, 21." But, a person of a humble spirit finds it difficult to assume to himself this character, because of the innumerable imperfections of which he is conscious; and, consequently, he is backward to claim the promises assigned to it. But the terms whereby the Lord's people are characterized in our text are such as the most humble may appropriate to themselves without boasting; and whatever is promised to them under that character, they may regard as their legitimate and assured portion.

The words before us will naturally lead me to show,

I. What is that contrition which the Lord approves.

There is a brokenness of heart which God does not approve, because it proceeds altogether from worldly sorrow, [Proverbs 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.13). But that brokenness of heart that which is associated with contrition for sin, is truly pleasing in his sight.

Let us more distinctly see what the contrition here designated is.

It is called a broken heart and contrite heart. It is founded altogether in a sense of one's sin, and in a consciousness of deserving God's wrath on account of sin! It is, however, no light sense of sin, but such a one as David had, when he said, "My iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me! [Psalm 38:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.4);" "My iniquities have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me! [Psalm 40:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.12)." Nor is it merely on account of the penalty annexed to transgression that they are so oppressed, but on account of its hateful nature, as defiling and debasing their souls. Hence they "loath themselves," as vile, and base, and filthy, and abominable! [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31). Yes, to their dying hour do they retain this humiliating sense of their own corruptions, notwithstanding they have a hope that God is pacified towards them; and even the more on account of that very mercy which they have experienced at his hands, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63).

Shall it be thought that such a sense of sin can befit those only who have been guilty of some flagrant enormities? I answer: It befits the most moral person upon earth, no less than the most abandoned sinner. I do not say that the moral and the immoral are upon a perfect level, either in the sight of God or man; for, beyond all doubt, all are hateful to God in proportion to the greatness and multitude of their iniquities; but there is no person so virtuous, but that he needs to be humbled before God in dust and ashes.

Let any man, however virtuous, look back upon his past life, and see how far he has been from God, and how entirely he has lived for himself. Let him consider how little sense he has had of his obligations to God, especially for all the wonders of redeeming love; and how often he has "done despite to the Holy Spirit," in resisting his sacred motions, and in deferring that great work which he knew to be necessary for the salvation of his soul. We quite mistake if we think that guilt attaches only to flagrant immoralities; the living without God in the world is the summit and consummation of all guilt; and where is the man who must not plead guilty to that charge? I suppose that no one will be found to arrogate to himself a higher character than that of Job, who, according to the testimony of God himself, was "a perfect and upright man;" yet even Job, when led into just views of himself, exclaim, "Behold, I am vile!" "I repent therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes! [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

This is the contrition which God approves.

This, however unamiable it may appear in the eyes of men, is most pleasing in the sight of God. And well it may be so; for it honors God's Law. The man who is not thus abased before God, declares, in effect, that there is no great evil in disregarding God's Law, and that there is no occasion for those who have transgressed it to be ashamed. But the truly contrite person who loathes himself for his iniquities, acknowledges that "the Law is holy, and just, and good," and that every transgression of it is a just ground for the deepest humiliation.

Moreover, the contrition here spoken of, justifies God's denunciations against sin. The unhumbled sinner says, in effect, God will not execute judgment; nor have I any cause to tremble for his displeasure; and if he were to consign me over to perdition on account of my sins—then he would be unmerciful and unjust!

On the contrary, the man whose heart is broken bears a very different testimony. He acknowledges that he deserves God's wrath and indignation; and that, whatever sentence the Judge shall pass upon him—he will be fully justified as not inflicting more than his iniquities have deserved! [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4).

Above all, the contrite person manifests a state of mind duly prepared for the reception of the Gospel. "What shall I do to be saved? [Acts 16:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30)" is his cry from day to day; and, when he finds that the Gospel makes known to him a Savior, O! how gladly does he embrace the offered mercy! How thankfully does he renounce all hope in himself, and puts on the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness!

The unhumbled sinner can hear the glad tidings of salvation without feeling any deep interest in them; but the truly contrite person regards the Savior, as the man who had accidentally slain a neighbor regarded the city of refuge; he knows that in Christ alone he can find safety; and he has no rest in his soul until he has fled for refuge to the hope set before him!

Thus, while the person that is "whole feels no need of the physician, the sick" and dying patient commits himself entirely to his care, and thankfully follows the regimen he prescribes. Well, therefore, may God approve of him, since he, and he alone, appreciates aright the gift of God's only dear Son to be the Savior of sinners.

But it will be proper to inquire,

II. In what way God will testify his approbation of a broken and contrite heart.

A person bowed down with a sense of sin is ready to fear that God will never show mercy to one so undeserving of it. But God promises, in our text, that,

1. God will be near unto those who are of a broken and contrite heart.

God, being everywhere present, may be supposed to be as near to one person as another. And so he is, if we regard his essence. But there are manifestations of the Divine presence, which the world at large have no conception of, but which are experienced by all who follow after God in the exercise of prayer and faith. The Apostle spoke not in his own person only, but in the person of believers generally, when he said, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." We are taught to expect, that if we "draw near to God—then he will draw near to us;" he will "lift up the light of his countenance upon us;" he will "shed abroad his love in our hearts;" he will enable us to cry with holy confidence, "Abba, Father;" and will "witness with our spirits that we are his."

Is anyone disposed to ask, "How can these things be?" "How is it that God will manifest himself to his people, and not unto the world?" This is the very question which one of the Apostles put to our Lord; who, in reply, confirmed the truth he had asserted; saying, "If any man loves me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him, [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23)."

2. God will save those who are of a broken and contrite heart.

Many are their fears in relation to their final blessedness; but "God will never allow so much as one of his little ones to perish." The contrite in particular he will save; for "he looks upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not—then God will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light, [Job 33:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.24); [Job 33:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.27-28)." Their temptations maybe many; but "He will not allow them to be tempted above that they are able; but will with the temptation make also for them a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it, 1 Corinthians 10:13." However numerous or potent their enemies may be, "he will deliver them out of the hands of all, [Luke 1:74](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.74)," and "make them more than conquerors over all, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)." In a word, "He will save them with an everlasting salvation; nor shall they be ashamed or confounded world without end! [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

But the text leads me rather to show you,

III. What present encouragement the very existence of a broken and contrite heart affords to those in whom it is found.

The contrition which has been described above, is the fruit and effect of God's love to the soul.

"The Lord is near unto those who are of a broken heart, and saves such as be of a contrite spirit." There is no work of divine grace more difficult than this! The taking away of the stony heart, and the giving a heart of flesh, is a new creation; and manifests as clearly the operation of Omnipotence as the universe itself. It is the very beginning of salvation in the soul. A person under a deep sense of sin is apt to imagine that God will not have mercy upon him; but his very contrition is a proof and evidence that God has already imparted to him his grace.

What a reviving consideration is this to the humble penitent! God is near you; he is in the very act of saving you. Why, then, are you cast down? Why are you "saying, The Lord has forsaken and forgotten me?"

Does the greatness of your guilt horrify you?

Who showed you your sins?

Who opened your eyes to see your sins?

Who softened your heart to hate your sins?

Who disposed you to condemn yourself for your sins, and to justify your God? Is this your own work, or the work of any enemy?

Does not the very nature of the work itself constrain you to say, "He who has wrought me to this self-same thing, is God!"

It is also the pledge and foretaste of your eternal inheritance.

Would God have done such things for you, if he had designed ultimately to destroy you? [Judges 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.23). These are only as the first-fruits, which sanctified and assured the whole harvest. He has expressly told us, that the gift of his "Spirit is a pledge of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14). See the whole of these assertions confirmed, [Psalm 91:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.14-16); [Psalm 145:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.18-19)."

You are aware what a pledge is; it is not only a pledge of future blessings, but the actual commencement of them in the soul. And, if you will survey the heavenly inhabitants, you will find that this very abasement of their souls before God is a striking feature in their character, and a grand constituent of their bliss. They all, with lowliest self-abasement, fall on their faces before the throne of God; while, with devoutest acclamations, they ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb, [Revelation 5:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8-10). Learn, then, to view all your feelings in their proper light; so shall you "from the eater bring forth meat, and from the strong shall bring forth sweet."

Let me not, however, **conclude** without addressing a few words:

1. To those in whom a broken and contrite heart is **not**found.

You, alas! have no part or lot in the blessedness which is prepared for the broken in heart. Look at the Pharisee and the Publican; the one was filled with self-delight, on account of his own imagined goodness; while the other dared not even to lift up his eyes to Heaven, on account of his own conscious unworthiness. But it was the latter, and not the former, who found acceptance with God. Just so, in all similar characters shall the same outcome be realized, as long as the world shall stand!

Humble yourselves, therefore, whoever you are; for in that way alone, have you any hope that God shall lift you up, [James 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7-8).

2. To those who are dejected by reason of their great sinfulness.

Forget not, I beseech you, for what end the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. Was it not to bind up the broken heart; and to give to those who "mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness! [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3) and [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18)." And, if the greatness of your past sins appears to be an obstacle in your way, has he not told you, that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound! [Romans 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20-21)." Yield not, then, to desponding thoughts, nor limit the mercy of your God; but know assuredly, that he will "heal the broken in heart, [Psalm 147:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.3)," and that all who come unto the Savior heavy-laden with their sins, shall be partakers of his promised eternal rest! [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28).

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THE SINNER'S HOPE

**[Psalm 35:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.3)**

"Say unto my soul: I am your salvation!"

Suspense is extremely painful to the human mind, and the more so in proportion to the danger to which we are exposed. David experienced this in a very high degree. In the Psalm before us, he appears to have been greatly agitated with fear on account of the number and malignity of the enemies who sought his ruin, and were exulting in the expectation of his speedy fall. Seeing no hope for himself in the efforts of his adherents, he betook himself to prayer, and with most earnest importunity implored that help from his Creator, which the creature was unable to afford. And as it was with an armed host that he was beset, he addressed the Lord under the character of a mighty warrior, to stand forth in his defense, "Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say unto my soul: "I am your salvation! [Psalm 35:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.1-3)"

I. This last petition I propose to consider, as offered by David himself.

Nothing could exceed the bitterness of David's enemies.

If we mark the diversified expressions in this Psalm, we shall have some idea of the danger to which he was exposed. Saul having determined if possible to destroy him—his subjects of every description leagued together to execute Saul's will. "False witnesses rose up, and laid to David's charge things which he knew not;" and, in confirmation of their accusations, declared that they were eye-witnesses of the acts imputed to him, verse 11, 21. Among the number of these were many on whom he had conferred the greatest obligations, verse 12, and to whom he had given no just occasion of offence, verse 19. "They devised deceitful matters against him, verse 20;" "they hid a net for him, and dug a pit for his soul, verse 7." To encourage one another in their odious work, "they winked with their eye, verse 19;" and, when they thought they had prevailed against him, "they rejoiced in his adversity, verse 15;" and "magnified themselves against him, verse 26," and "said in their hearts, Ah! so would we have it; we have swallowed him up! verse 26." The very despicables, encouraged by the example of their superiors, gathered themselves together against David, and tore him incessantly; while hypocritical mockers in their feasts, (pretending to more humanity,) yet "gnashed upon him with their teeth, verses 15, 16." In a word, all classes of the community lay in wait for his soul, verse 4, and, like lions prowling for their prey, sought to destroy and to devour him, verses 17, 25.

Under these circumstances David cried to God for help.

The particular expression in our text is worthy of notice, especially as showing what thoughts the Psalmist entertained of God. He believed that God was able to deliver him, however powerful his enemies might be. He knew, that if God was for him, then "no weapon that was formed against him could prosper." Nor did he doubt the goodness of God, as willing to hear and answer his petitions, and to afford him the protection which he so earnestly desired.

But that which chiefly demands our attention is David's persuasion of the condescension of the Most High, in that he prayed, nor merely for deliverance, but for such an assurance of it to his soul, as should calm all the tumult of his mind, and fill him with perfect peace.

Now this was the sure way to succeed in prayer. Nothing so secures the interposition of God in our behalf, as the magnifying of him in our hearts, "Those who honor him, he will honor." If we limit his mercies, he will limit his gifts. If we doubt his power or willingness to help, he will withhold such displays of his mercy as he would otherwise have given, [Matthew 13:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.58). On the other hand, if we are steadfast in believing expectations of his mercy, we shall have such discoveries of his glory as an unbelieving heart has no conception of! [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40). We should never forget that there is nothing too great to ask of God. We never can "open our mouth, so wide, but he will fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10);" nor can we ever be more enlarged in our petitions towards him, than he will be in his communications towards us, [2 Corinthians 6:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.11-13).

II. The petition in our text is still more deserving of attention, as suited to **us**.

Imminent as David's dangers were—they are not to be compared with those to which we are exposed.

David's enemies might be eluded, intimidated, vanquished; but those with which the soul of every sinner is encompassed can never be eluded, never be overcome.

Sin is a deadly foe that seeks to destroy every man!

Sin lies in wait for us—to allure, to deceive, to ruin us!

Sin clothes itself in subtle array.

Sin comes with a friendly aspect.

Sin bids us to fear no harm. Sin tells us, "We shall have peace, though we yield to its fascinations! [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19)."

But sin is no sooner committed, than it is registered in the book of God's remembrance, and will come forth at a future period as a swift witness against all whom it has deceived!

From man, sin may be hidden; and even by those who have committed it, it may be forgotten. But "it hunts the wicked man to overthrow him! [Psalm 140:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 140.11);" and though it does not immediately seize the sinner as its prey, "be sure your sin will find you out! [Numbers 32:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.23)." And like a millstone about his neck, sin will surely sink him into everlasting perdition! [James 1:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.14-15).

The law of God also follows with its curses, all who have transgressed its commands, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). It is inexorable. The law is a creditor that cannot be satisfied, or appeased. It will take the sinner by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe me!" and, when we cannot discharge our debt, "it will listen to no entreaties, but will cast us into prison, until we have paid the uttermost farthing!" God himself appealed to his people of old respecting this, "My words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they returned, and said, Like as the Lord Almighty thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings—so has he dealt with us, [Zechariah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 1.6)." Of the six hundred thousand men who came out of Egypt, how many entered into Canaan? None, except Joshua and Caleb; who "had followed the Lord fully." Against all the rest a sentence of death was denounced in the very first year of their sojourning in the wilderness; and at the close of the forty years a minute inquiry was instituted; and not one was found alive! [Numbers 14:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.28); [Numbers 29:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 29.35-38).

So it will be found in the last day, that of all the threatenings in the book of God, not one has fallen to the ground; and that, of all who mourned not over their transgressions of the law, not one escaped the vengeance of his God. God has said:

"The soul that sins, it shall surely die! [Ezekiel 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.4)."

"Their foot shall slide in due time! [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35)."

"They shall all be turned into Hell, even all the nations that forget him! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)."

"He will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup! [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.6)."

God himself has declared these things, and whether we will believe it or not, his law shall be thus honored, and his justice shall be thus magnified, on every impenitent transgressor! He already is he "whetting his sword for the execution of his vengeance upon them; and soon will he make his arrows drunk with their blood! [Deuteronomy 32:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.41-42)."

There is yet another adversary, who is lying in wait for our souls, and, like a roaring lion, going about, seeking to devour us—and that is Satan; nor can we have any conception of the wiles and devices to which he has recourse, in order to accomplish his malignant purpose. Even in Paradise he prevailed to ensnare and ruin our first parents; and the same temptations he puts in our way, assuring us, that, in following his counsel, we shall have unqualified pleasure, and blessedness without alloy. He is in Scripture compared to "a fowler, [Psalm 91:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.3); and, like a fowler, he spreads his nets, and allures us by temptations suited to our appetites, and by the example of sinners whom he has already ensnared, and whom he makes use of to decoy us.

We see nothing but the promised gratification; and while one or another invites us to participate his supposed joys, we flock to him, "without considering that it is for our life! [Proverbs 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 7.23)." Thus it is that the drunkard, the whoremonger, the adulterer is ensnared! He thinks of nothing but his pleasure; but the fowler who lays the snare, foresees and knows the end. Having succeeded in "taking us alive, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)," he "keeps us in peace, [Luke 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21)," and does all he can to hide from us our bondage. But he knows that those who now yield to his solicitations as a tempter, will soon experience his power as a tormentor!

Another enemy also that is confederate against us, is death. He is waiting every moment to execute his commission against us; well knowing, that the instant he can inflict the stroke he desires, all hope of our deliverance is at an end forever. He has his eye steadily fixed on people of every age and station; and the instruments he has at his command are as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore! When Death comes in his more visible and gradual assaults, he contrives to hide his ultimate designs, and to divert the minds of the sufferers from the thoughts of a hereafter. As the avenger of sin, Death entered into the world, [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12); and in the same character he is daily sweeping millions from the earth; and in malignant triumph Death is bearing his unhappy victims to the tribunal of their God.

Hell too combines with all the rest, and is opening wide its jaws to receive its destined prey. What the prophet said respecting the king of Babylon, may be said to every impenitent sinner under Heaven, "Hell from beneath is moved for you, to meet you at your coming! [Isaiah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.9)." As in that instance "it stirred up the chief ones of the earth, and raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations" to exult over the fallen monarch, so those people who were once our partners in sin, or whom by our example we hardened in their iniquities, will all come forth to meet us, that they may in the midst of all their own torments have the malignant pleasure of beholding and of aggravating ours.

It is said, that in the last day "the angels will bind up sinners in bundles to burn them;" and for this end, no doubt, that those who have been associates in wickedness may, by their mutual execrations, augment each other's misery to all eternity. For this all Hell is waiting!

We are told indeed respecting the Rich Man, who lifting up his eyes in torments, desired that a messenger might be sent to his five surviving brethren, to "warn them, lest they also should come into the same place of torment;" but this was not from any love to them, but from self-love; knowing as he did by bitter experience, how greatly his own sufferings would be increased by the reproaches of those whom by his influence and example he had so contributed to destroy!

Know then, beloved, that if David was in danger from the thousands who sought his life—then you are in ten thousand times more in danger:  
from sin, which deceives you;  
from the law, which denounces its curses against you;  
from Satan, who arms all the hosts of Hell against you;  
from Death, that is ever waiting to cut you down; and  
from Hell, that is already yawning to swallow you up!

Say then, whether David's petition is not altogether suited to our state?

To whom will you go for salvation, if not to the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you look to any efforts of your own? Can you ever cancel the guilt of sin? Can you ever satisfy the demands of God's law? Can you ever vanquish Satan and all the powers of darkness? Can you ever overcome death and Hell, so that they shall lose all their terrors, and have no power over you?

The hope of any such thing is altogether vain and impossible!

If the whole world combined to aid you, they could effect nothing. "Though hand joined in hand" throughout the globe, "no sinner in the universe could go unpunished! [Proverbs 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.21)."

None can ever blot out one single sin, but He who made atonement for sin by the blood of his cross.

None can silence the demands of God's law, but He who endured its penalties, and obeyed its precepts, in order that he might "bring in an everlasting righteousness," and "make us the righteousness of God in him."

None can "bruise Satan under our feet," but He who "triumphed over him upon the cross," and in his ascension "led captivity itself captive."

None can divest Death and Hell of their terrors, but "He who has the keys of both, and opens so that none can shut, and shuts so that none can open."

Go then to him for it in David's words, "Lord, say unto my soul, I am your salvation." Offer this petition humbly; offer it earnestly; offer it in faith. Never, from the foundation of the world, did Jesus cast out one who came to him in sincerity and truth. If you plead with him in faith, then all these enemies shall be subdued before you; and all your sorrows shall be turned into joy. See, in the prophecies of Isaiah, what your state shall then be, "You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation! [Isaiah 12:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.1-2)." Here you see that he will not only give you the deliverance you desire, but the assurance of it also, saying to your soul, "I am your salvation."

Beloved brethren, think what blessedness you will then enjoy. See it in David, "My soul, wait only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God [Psalm 62:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.5-7)." He then encourages you to follow his example, "Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before him; God is a refuge for us! [Psalm 62:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.8)." This is the very advice which I would give also, "Pour out your hearts before him, and trust in him." For what happiness can you possess in this world, while your soul, your immortal soul, is in such imminent danger? If you were only, like David, encompassed with armed hosts that were seeking to destroy you, you would be full of alarm and terror; and can you enjoy a moment's ease, while it is doubtful whether in the space of a few days you shall not lie down in everlasting burnings? I beg you to awake from your security; and "give neither sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids," until you have a good and well-founded hope, that Jesus is your Savior, and until you are enabled to say with Paul, "He has loved me, and given himself for me!"

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COMPASSION TO THE SICK

**[Psalm 35:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.13-14)**

"When they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother."

The precepts of Christianity are so pure and exalted, that all attempt to perfectly obey them must be vain. This is particularly the case with respect to the conduct which is to be observed towards those who injure us. To merely forgive them, is not sufficient. We must not only forbear to avenge ourselves upon them, but must do good to them, and act towards them with most unbounded benevolence, "I say unto you," says our Lord, "Love your enemies; bless those who curse you; do good to those who hate you; and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you." But this duty is by no means impractical; for even under the Law it was practiced to an astonishing extent by David, who labored to the uttermost, not only "not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good."

Scarcely anything could exceed the bitterness of Saul towards his servant David; yet when David had him altogether, and as it would seem by a special intervention of Providence, in his power, he would neither hurt him himself, nor allow him to be hurt by others; nay more, when either Saul, or any of those who joined with him in his relentless persecution of an unoffending servant, were stricken with any disease by God himself, so far from rejoicing at it, or even being unconcerned about it, David laid it to heart, and set himself by fasting and prayer to obtain for them a removal, or at least a sanctified improvement of their sufferings; in a word, he felt for them as if they had been his dearest friends, or his most honored relatives.

While this conduct of David evinced the height of his attainments in relation to a forgiving spirit, it showed how justly he estimated the condition of a man oppressed with sickness, and at the same time destitute of the consolations of genuine religion, and unprepared to meet his God.

This is a subject deserving of peculiar attention; for, in truth, it is very seldom viewed as it ought to be, even by religious men. Slighter feelings of sympathy are common enough; but such as are described in our text are rarely experienced. To excite them in all our hearts, we shall show,

I. How much the sick stand in need of our compassion.

Ungodly men, whether in health or sickness, are in a truly pitiable condition; for "they are walking in darkness, and ignorant of where they are going," while they are on the very brink and precipice of the bottomless abyss of Hell! But in sickness they are peculiar objects of our compassion; for,

They are then bereft of all that they before enjoyed.

The pleasures of society, the sports of the field, the amusements of the theater or the ball, and even the researches of science, have now lost their relish. They have neither strength nor spirits for such employments. Even the light itself, which is so cheering to those in health, is almost excluded from their chamber, because of their inability to endure its splendor.

Nor have they any substitute to repair their loss.

Those who were their companions in pleasure, have no taste for those things which alone would administer comfort in this trying hour. They may make from time to time their complimentary inquiries, but they cannot sympathize with the afflicted, and, by participation, lighten their burdens. If they come to visit their friend, they have nothing to speak of but vanity, nothing that can strengthen his weak hands, or sustain his troubled mind. "Miserable comforters are they all, and physicians of no value!"

Nor does the sick person himself find it so easy to turn his mind to heavenly things as he once imagined. When immersed in the world, he supposed that it would be time enough to think of eternity when he should be laid aside by sickness; and he concluded that in that season he should feel no difficulty in turning his mind to heavenly contemplations; but he now finds that this is a very unfavorable season for such employment, and that pain or lassitude unfit him for them. He cannot collect his mind; he cannot fix it with any energy on things to which it has been a stranger; and the feelings of the body almost incapacitate him from attending to the concerns of the soul. Thus, however he may abound in worldly wealth and honor—he is a poor, destitute, unhappy being!

But the distress of sick people is greatly aggravated, if **poverty**is added to all their other trials.

A poor man in a state of health is as happy as his richer neighbors; but when he falls into sickness, his condition is very pitiable. He is unable to procure the aid which his disorders call for; yes, he cannot provide even the necessities of life. His family, deprived of his earnings, fall into extreme poverty. The little comforts which they have hitherto had for clothing by day and for rest by night, now are sold one after another to supply food for the body, or are pledged never more to be redeemed. Cold, hunger, and nakedness, greatly aggravate the pressure of their disorders; and the miseries of a dependent family are an overwhelming addition to the weight already insupportable. The resources which might somewhat alleviate the sorrows of one in opulence, are wholly lacking to the poor; so that, if they have not the consolations of religion to support them in their sickness, they are objects of the deepest commiseration.

Let us then consider,

II. What is that measure of compassion which we ought to exercise towards them.

If we consider only the temporal distress of the sick, our sympathy with them should be deep.

It is not sufficient to express a few words of commiseration, and to send a little relief; we should feel for them as for ourselves; and bear a part of their burdens in our heart, no less than in our purse. It was in this way that Job exercised this amiable disposition, "Did not I weep for him who was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor? [Job 30:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 30.25)." And it is in this way that we also must fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2). [Romans 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.15).

But more especially should we feel this from a regard for their souls.

As pious as David was, we can have no doubt but that in his griefs for Saul and Doeg, he had respect to their spiritual, as well as their temporal, condition. And this accounts for the strong feelings expressed in our text. He knew in what a fearful state they would be found, if they should die impenitent; and therefore, to obtain for them, if possible, a deliverance from such a heavy judgment—David fasted, and prayed, and clothed himself with sackcloth, and pleaded with God in their behalf, just as if they had been his dearest friends or relatives. He forgot all the injuries which they had done to him, and were daily heaping upon him, from a persuasion that they did infinitely greater injury to their own souls, than it was possible for them to do to him. The thought of the danger in which they were of perishing forever, quite overwhelmed him, so that he was bowed down, and as it were inconsolable, on their account.

Now this is precisely the state in which our minds should be towards people on a bed of sickness, whether they are rich or poor, friends or enemies. Their souls should be precious in our eyes; and we should exercise towards them that very same love which filled the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who, though he was rich—yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)."

Nor let it be thought that this is proper for ministers only, or for those who have nothing else to occupy their time. David was accustomed to scenes of blood, and occupied day and night with the laborious duties of a military General; yet he blended the feelings of sympathy and compassion with the intrepidity and ardor of a man of war. In like manner should we, however high our station, or numerous our engagements, find time and inclination for all the offices of Christian love.

That we may be stirred up to such benevolence, let us contemplate,

III. The benefit that will accrue from it to our own souls.

Our exertions, however great, may not always prosper in the way we would wish.

We fear that Saul and Doeg were but little profited by the sympathy of David. And we also may abound in visiting the sick, and see but little fruit of our labor. Indeed, much of the fruit which we think we see, proves only like the blossom that is soon nipped by the frost, and disappoints our expectations. Not that our labor shall be altogether in vain. We are persuaded, that if we labor with assiduity and tenderness to benefit the souls of men, God will make some use of us. Like Isaiah, we may have occasion to say, "Who has believed our report?" yet, like him, we shall have in the last day some to present to the Lord, saying, "Here am I, and the children you have given me." "The bread that we have cast upon the waters shall, in part at least, be found after many days."

But our labor shall surely be recompensed into our own bosom.

So David found it; his fastings and prayers, if lost to others, were not lost to himself, "they returned into his own bosom."

And thus it will be with us. The very exercise of love, like the incense which regales the offerer with its fragrances, is a rich recompense to itself. Moreover, every exercise of love, even to our enemies, strengthens the habit of love in our souls, and thereby transforms us more and more into the Divine image. And may we not say, that exercises of love will bring God himself down into the soul?

We appeal to those who are in the habit of visiting the chambers of the sick, whether they have not often found God more present with them on such occasions than at any other time or place? Have they not often, when they have gone with coldness, and even with reluctance, to visit the sick, received such tokens of God's acceptance, as have filled them with shame and self-abhorrence, for not delighting more in such offices of love?

But, if even here on earth so rich a recompense is given, what shall we receive hereafter, when every act of love will be recorded, acknowledged, recompensed; and not even a cup of cold water given for the sake of Christ, shall lose its reward? Little as we think of such actions, (and little we ought to think of them as done by ourselves) our God and Savior regards them with infinite delight, and will accept every one of them as done unto himself! "I was sick and in prison, and you visited me." Let all then know, if they thus invite the sick, the lame, the blind, to participate with them in their temporal and spiritual advantages, "they shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just, [Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.14). [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10)."

ADDRESS.

1. The poor.

We have represented you as in some respects under great disadvantages in a time of sickness; but in other respects the advantage is altogether on your side. The friends of the rich are almost uniformly bent on keeping from them all those who would seek to benefit their souls.

But if a benevolent Christian does get access to you in your sickness and poverty, he begins at once to instruct you in the things that belong to your everlasting peace. Thus all the treasures of redeeming love are opened to you, while they are studiously withheld from the rich; and all the consolations of the Gospel are poured into your souls, while even a taste of them is denied to thousands, either through their own contempt of Christ, or through the blindness and prejudice of ungodly friends.

Know then, that if on account of your lack of temporal comforts we compassionate your state, we rather commend you on the advantages you enjoy for your immortal souls. God has said, that "he has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom;" and therefore we call upon you to take this into your estimate of your condition, and to adore God for having chosen better for you, than you would have chosen for yourselves.

2. Those who engage in visiting the poor.

This is a good and blessed office, in the conscientious discharge of which, religion in no small degree consists, [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27). Abound then, as far as your situation and circumstances will admit of it, in this holy work; but take especial care that you perform it in a proper spirit. If you would have those whom you visit to weep, you yourself must be filled with compassion, and weep over them. This is a state of mind which an angel might envy. Never did Jesus himself appear more glorious, not even on Mount Tabor, than when he wept at the grave of Lazarus! [John 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.35). Nor does God ever delight in his people more than when he sees them abounding in acts of love to men for their Redeemer's sake! [Matthew 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.4). Only see to it that you "draw out not your purse only, but "your souls" also to the afflicted, and God will recompense it into your bosom a hundred-fold! [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11).

3. The congregation at large.

In order to administer relief to any extent, considerable funds are necessary; and where any measure of benevolence exists, it will be a pleasure to contribute towards the carrying on a work of such incalculable importance. When Paul went up to confer with the Apostles at Jerusalem, they added nothing to his knowledge of the Gospel, "only they desired that he should remember the poor; the same which I also (says he) was forward to do, [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)." To you then would we recommend the same benevolent disposition; and we pray God that there may be in you the same readiness to cultivate it to the uttermost. All may not have time or ability to do much in instructing and comforting the poor; but all, even the widow with a single mite, may testify their love to the poor, and their desire to advance the good work in which a select number are engaged. Even those who are "in deep poverty, may abound unto the riches of liberality! [2 Corinthians 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.1-4)." Let all then "prove the sincerity of their love to Christ" by their compassion to his poor members, 2 Corinthians 8:8; and let them know, that "even a cup of cold water given for his sake shall never lose its reward!"

#557

AWFUL STATE OF UNGODLY MEN

**[Psalm 36:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.1)**

"Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes!"

When we speak of the wickedness of mankind, that command of our Lord is frequently cast in our teeth, "Judge not, that you be not judged." But the command in this verse refers to an uncharitable ascribing of good actions to a bad principle; which, as we cannot see the heart, we are by no means authorized to do. But, if it does not authorize us to "call good evil," it assuredly does not require us to "call evil good." If we see sin, then it is no uncharitableness to pronounce it to be sin. And if the sin is habitual, then it is no uncharitableness to say, that the heart from which it proceeds is wicked and depraved!

We are told by our Lord, that "the tree is to be judged of by its fruit; and that as a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, so neither can a good tree habitually bring forth evil fruit, [Matthew 7:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.16-18)." An error, and even a fault may be committed, without detracting from a person's general character; but a sinful course of life involves in it, of necessity, a corruption of heart; and carries with it a conviction that the person who pursues that wicked course has not within him the fear of God. This was the impression made on David's mind, when he said, "Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes."

In confirmation of this sentiment, I will show,

I. How **God** interprets sin.

God views sin not merely as contained in overt acts, but as existing in the soul. He judges of sin's malignity, not according to its aspect upon social happiness, but as it bears on himself, and affects his honor. Throughout the whole Sacred Volume, God speaks of it in this view. He represents sin as striking at the relation which exists between him and his creatures:

1. God views sin as **spiritual adultery** against Himself.

He is the Husband of his Church, [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5), and claims our entire and exclusive regards, [Hosea 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.3). When these are alienated from him, and fixed on the creature, he calls it adultery, [Ezekiel 16:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.37); and hence James, speaking of those who sought the friendship of the world, addresses them as "adulterers and adulteresses! [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4);" because, as the Spouse of Christ, they have placed on another the affections due to him alone.

2. God views sin as **rebellion** against Himself.

God, as the Governor of the universe, requires us to obey his laws. But sin is an opposition to his will, and a violation of his laws; and therefore God says respecting it, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7)." Here, let it be observed, it is not the overt act, but the disposition only, that is so characterized; and, consequently, if the very disposition as existing in the soul is an equivocal proof of the wickedness of the heart, then much more must the outward act, and especially the constant habit of the life, be considered as a decisive evidence that the soul itself is corrupt!

3. God views sin as **idolatry** against Himself.

God alone is to be worshiped; and to put anything in competition with him is to make it an idol. Hence the love of money is called idolatry, [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.5); and the indulgence of a sensual appetite is to "make our belly our God, [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.19)." And hence John, having set forth "the Lord Jesus as the true God and eternal life," guards us against any alienation of our hearts from him, in these memorable words, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols! 1 [John 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.20-21)." And here let me again observe, it is the disposition, and not any outward act, which has this construction put upon it.

4. God views sin as **downright atheism** against Himself.

It is represented as a denial of all God's attributes and perfections.

Sin denies God's omnipresence and omniscience; since men, in committing it, say, "What does God know? Does he judge through such darkness? Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us as he goes about in the vaulted heavens! [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14). See also [Psalm 73:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.11); [Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7)." They think that God has no desire to attend to what is done on earth.

Sin denies God's justice and his holiness. Men say:

"I shall have peace, though I walk after the vain imaginations of my heart! [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19)."

"God will never require at my hands what I do! [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13)."

"He will not do good; neither will he do evil, [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)."

So far from having anything to fear from God, they say, "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?" [Malachi 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.17)."

Sin denies the right of God to control us, "We are Lords; we will come no more to you! [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31);" "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us! [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)." "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit is there, that we should pray unto him, [Job 21:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14-15)."

Sin even denies the very existence of God, "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God! [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1)." Hence Paul calls us "Atheists in the world [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)." Men will not say all this with their lips; but it is the language of their lives, and therefore of their hearts.

Having seen how God interprets sin, and what construction he puts upon it, we are prepared to see:

II. What interpretation **we** should put upon sin.

No inference was ever more legitimately drawn from the plainest premises, than that which forced itself upon David's mind, from a view of the ungodly world. And the same conclusion must we also arrive at, from all that we see around us, "Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes!"

1. There is no concern about **God's presence**.

A thief would not steal, if he knew that the eyes of the proprietor were fastened on him; yes, even the presence of a child would be sufficient to keep the adulterer from the perpetration of his heinous sins. But he nas no regard for the presence of Almighty God. If he is out of the sight of any fellow-creature, he says in his heart, "No eye sees me! [Job 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 24.15);" never reflecting that "the darkness is no darkness with God, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to him are both alike! [Psalm 139:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.11-12)."

2. There is no regard for **God's authority**.

Men will stand in awe of the civil magistrate, who he knows to be "an avenger of evil, and that he does not bear the sword in vain." To see to what an extent men stand in awe of earthly governors, conceive in what a state of confusion even this Christian land would be, if only for one single week the laws were suspended, and no restraint were imposed on men beyond that which they feel from a regard to the authority of God. We should not dare to venture out of our houses, or scarcely be safe in our houses, by reason of the flood of iniquity which would deluge the land. And though it is true that every one would not avail himself of the licence to commit all manner of abominations, it is equally true, that it is not God's authority that would restrain them; for the same authority that says, "Do not kill, or commit adultery," says, You shall "live not unto yourself, but unto Him who died for you and rose again." And if we are not influenced by God's authority in everything, then we regard it truly in nothing, [James 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10-11).

3. There is no concern for **God's approbation**.

If we are lowered in the estimation of our fellow-creatures, then how mortified are we, insomuch that we can scarcely bear to abide in the place where we are so degraded. An exile to the remotest solitude would be preferable to the presence of those whose good opinion we have forfeited, But who inquires whether God is pleased or displeased? Who lays to heart the disapprobation which he has excited in God's mind, or the record that is kept concerning him in the book of God's remembrance? If we preserve our outward conduct correct, so as to secure the approbation of our fellow-creatures, then we are satisfied, and care little what God sees within, or what estimate he forms of our character!

4. There is no fear of **God's displeasure**.

One would think it impossible that men should believe in a future state of retribution, and yet be altogether careless about the doom that shall be awarded to them. They think that God is merciful—too merciful to punish anyone, unless it be, perhaps, some extraordinarily flagrant transgressor. Hence, though they know they are sinners, they never think of repenting, or of changing that course of life which, if the Scriptures are true, must lead them to perdition.

Only see the state of the first converts, or of any who have felt their danger of God's wrath; and then tell me whether that is the experience of the world at large? Where do we see the weeping penitents smiting on their bosom, and crying for mercy? Where do we see people flying to Christ for refuge, as the manslayer fled from the sword of the avenger, that was pursuing him? In the world at large we see nothing of this; nothing, in fact, but supineness and security; so true is the judgment of the Psalmist respecting them, that "there is no fear of God before their eyes!" The same testimony Paul also bears, [Romans 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.18); and we know that his record is true.

If, then, David's views are indeed correct, see,

1. How marvelous is the forbearance of our God!

He sees the state of every living man; he sees, not our actions only, but our very thoughts, for "he tries the heart and thoughts." What evils, then, does he behold in every quarter of the globe! Not a country, a town, a village, a family, no, nor a single soul—is exempt from the common malady of sin! All are fallen in sin. All are "enemies in their hearts to God by wicked works!"

Take but a single city, our own metropolis for instance, and what a mass of iniquity does God behold in it, even in the short space of twenty-four hours! Is it not astonishing that God's wrath does not break forth against us, even as against Sodom and Gomorrah, to consume us by fire; or that another deluge does not come, to sweep us away from the face of the earth! Dear brethren, "account this patience of our God to be salvation, [2 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.15)," and "let it lead every one of you to repentance, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4)."

2. How unbounded is the love of God, who has provided a Savior for us!

Behold, instead of destroying the world by one stroke of his indignation, he has sent us his co-equal and co-eternal Son to effect a reconciliation between him and us, by the sacrifice of himself! Yes, "he has so loved the world, as to have given his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16)." "He sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world," as we might rather have expected, "but that the world through him might be saved, [John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.17)."

What, then, my beloved brethren, "shall your transgressions say to you?" Shall they not say, "Avail yourselves of the offered mercy? Delay not an hour to seek a saving interest in that Savior, so that your sins may be blotted out, and your souls be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus!" Let this love of God constrain you to surrender up yourselves to him as his redeemed people; and so to walk before him in newness of heart and life, that "Christ may be magnified in you, whether by life or death! [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20)."

#558

THE SELF-FLATTERING DELUSIONS OF SINNERS EXPOSED

**[Psalm 36:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.2)**

"He flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated."

It may well astonish us to see how careless and indifferent men are about the favor of God. But the Psalmist assigns the true reason for it. Every one cherishes in his mind some delusion whereby he lulls his conscience asleep; and thus, notwithstanding his guilt and danger, he rests satisfied with his state, until God himself interposes, in a way of mercy or of judgment, to undeceive him!

To elucidate this verse, we shall,

I. Point out some of the self-flattering delusions which are commonly entertained.

We shall notice:

1. Some delusions which prevail among **the careless world**.

They imagine that God does not regard the conduct of his creatures, [Job 22:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13). [Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7). But it is a sad delusion, [Proverbs 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.3). [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5). [Ecclesiastes 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.14). [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20).

Or they think that God is too merciful to consign them over to everlasting perdition [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12). 2 Peter 3:4. But this is also a fatal error, [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17) and [2 Peter 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4-6); [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.9).

Or they assume that a nominal repentance will suffice. But repentance is not so insignificant a thing as men suppose. It is nothing less than a radical renovation of the heart in all its powers; a putting off the old man, and a putting on the new man, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3). [Ephesians 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.22-24).

Or that there is plenty of time to think of seriously about turning to God, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25). If other delusions have proved fatal to thousands, this has destroyed tens of thousands. The folly of it appears from [James 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.14). [Luke 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.20) and [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3). [Proverbs 1:24-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-31).

2. Some delusions which prevail among those who profess some regard for religion.

They judge that a moral conduct, with a regular observance of the outward forms of religion, is all that is required. Our Lord warns us against this mistake in [Matthew 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.20)

Or they assume that the notional embracing of the truths of the Gospel, and the joining of themselves in church membership, is a true and scriptural conversion. But what did this avail for the Foolish Virgins? [Matthew 25:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.1-12). What did this avail for Judas? [Matthew 26:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.21-24). See also, [Matthew 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.30); [Matthew 13:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.40-42).

Or they imagine that the having had their affections strongly exercised about religious things in childhood or in some previous period, is a proof of their present acceptance with God. Such notions are common, [Matthew 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20), but awfully delusive! [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6). [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21).

Or they assume that a present pleasure in religious duties with a partial mortification of sin, is a sufficient evidence of their sincerity. This is the thought of many, [Isaiah 58:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.2-3). [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32). [Psalm 78:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-35). But nothing less than an unreserved obedience to God will prove us to be God's children! [1 John 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.7). [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48).

But the vanity of these delusions will appear, while we:

II. Show when and how they shall be removed.

The eyes of all will sooner or later be opened, and their vain conceits be dissipated.

1. Some will have their errors rectified in **conversion**.

When the Spirit of God enlightens the mind of man, he scatters the clouds of ignorance and error; and, as far at least as respects the foregoing delusions, guides them into the knowledge of the truth.

He shows us, not only that our sins are known to God—but that we are in danger of condemnation on account of them, and that we ought to turn to God instantly, and with our whole hearts! [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37); [Acts 16:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30).

He reveals to us also, that no form of godliness, no change of sentiment, no moving of the affections, no partial reformation of the life, will suffice; but that if we will serve the Lord in truth, we must give up ourselves wholly to him and without reserve! [Psalm 18:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.23) and [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1).

Particularly he makes us to see "the hatefulness" of the most refined hypocrisy; and even of the remains of sin, which, in spite of our most earnest endeavors to destroy it—yet war in our members, [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18). [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26). [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6). [Romans 7:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.21-24).

2. Others will have their misapprehensions removed in **condemnation at the day of judgement**.

Too many, alas! hold fast their delusions in spite of the warnings of God's Word, and all the merciful or afflictive dispensations of his providence. But, as soon as ever they come into the eternal world, they will be undeceived. The sight of a holy God, together with the hearing of that sentence which their once compassionate, but now indignant Judge will pass upon them; and, above all, the feeling of the torments of Hell—will convince them of their mistakes, and leave them no room to doubt, but that the care of the soul was "the one thing needful," and that every Word of God shall be fulfilled in its season.

Advice.

1. Do not only confer with fallible men in the eternal concerns of your soul.

All unregenerate men endeavor to bring down the Word of God to some standard of their own; and consequently will discourage in us everything that goes beyond the line which they have drawn for themselves. But, if they deceive us, they cannot afford us any remedy in the eternal world.

The Word of God is the only standard of right and wrong; and by that alone, we shall be judged in the last day. Let us therefore regulate our opinions and conduct, not according to the opinions of fallible men, but according to the unerring declarations of God himself. And instead of endeavoring to lower the demands of God to our wishes or attainments, let us labor to raise our practice to the strictest requisitions of God's law! [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14).

2. Pray for the teaching of God's Spirit.

With deceitful hearts, a subtle adversary, and a tempting world—we are continually in danger; nor can we hope to be guided aright but by the Spirit of the living God. Even the Scriptures themselves will be "a dead letter," and "a sealed book" to us, unless the Spirit of God opens our minds to understand them! He has promised to lead us into all truth; and if we are really disposed to embrace the truth, he will reveal it to us. But if, through our hatred of the light, we shut our eyes against it, God will give us over to our delusions, that we may believe a lie! [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19). [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12), and [Isaiah 66:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3-4).

Let us therefore guard against self-deception, and submit ourselves to the guidance of God's Spirit. Then, though our capacities are ever so small, we shall be kept from every fundamental error, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8) and [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25), and be "made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ."

3. Seek above all to know the hatefulness of sin.

Nothing but a discovery of the evil of sin will effectually preserve us from self-deceit. To produce this, is the first saving work of the Spirit; and the more this is wrought in the heart, the more shall we be on our guard against all self-flattering delusions!

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SIN TO BE ABHORRED

**[Psalm 36:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.1-4)**

"An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not abhor evil!"

The standard of morals in the Christian world is far below that which is established in the Sacred Records; and hence arises that self-justifying spirit which prevails in every place. Gross iniquities, which affect the welfare of society, are condemned; but less flagrant offences are regarded as trivial, and justified as unavoidable in this state of human existence.

The person immediately referred to in my text was Saul, who, amidst all his professions of penitence, still entertained murderous designs against the life of David. But we need not limit the words to Saul. They are, like many similar passages cited by Paul in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, [Romans 3:10-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-19), expressive of the state of our fallen nature, and universally applicable to every man. To elucidate them, I will show,

I. How great an evil sin is.

There is scarcely anything which is vile and loathsome to which sin is not compared. Let us instance this in leprosy; which may be considered as the most spreading, the most defiling, the most incurable of all disorders. In reference to this does the Prophet Isaiah speak of himself and all around him as utterly undone, "Woe is me! I am undone; I am a man of impure lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of impure lips! [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5)." But, not to lay an undue stress on figures like these:

1. We must consider sin as a violation of God's holy Law.

The Law of God is said to be "holy, and just, and good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12)."

The Law of God is holy, as being a perfect transcript of God's mind and will.

It is just, as requiring nothing which does not necessarily arise out of our relation to Tod and to each other.

And it is good, as tending, in every instance, to the happiness of the creature, and to the honor of our Creator.

Now "sin is a transgression of this Law, [1 John 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.4);" and that very circumstance is that which renders it "so exceeding sinful! [Romans 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.13)." Were the Law itself less excellent, a departure from it would be less odious; but to rebel against it, is to prefer the mind of Satan to the mind of God, and the service of the devil to the service of our God!

If we would see in what light God views it, let us go back to the time of Adam, on whose heart this Law was completely written, and see what one single transgression of it brought on him; and not on him only, but on the whole creation; and then we shall say indeed, that the evil of sin far exceeds all that language can express, or that any finite intelligence can conceive!

2. We must consider sin as a contradiction to God's blessed Gospel.

To obviate the effects of sin, God sent his only dear Son into the world; that he might "put away the guilt of sin by the sacrifice of himself, [Hebrews 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.26);" and that by the operations of his Holy Spirit he might repress sin's power, and "destroy the works of the devil, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8)." But sin contravenes all his merciful intentions and defeats all his gracious purposes.

Now, let us suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ were now at this time to come into this assembly; and that, instead of receiving him with all that admiring and adoring gratitude that would befit us—we were to rise up against him, and beat him down, and trample him under foot; and that, on his exhibiting the wounds once made for us on Calvary, and yet bleeding for us—we were to regard his blood as an accursed thing, and seize him, and nail him to a cross, and load him with our execrations until we saw him dead before our eyes!

What would be thought of us? Yes, in a moment of reflection, what would we think of ourselves? Yet that is what sin does, and what all of us do whenever we commit sin; for so has the Apostle said, that "we tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of his grace! [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29)." Yes, "we crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame! [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6)."

It is no wonder, then, that God, when dissuading us from the commission of sin, addresses us m those pungent terms, "O, do not that abominable thing which I hate! [Jeremiah 44:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.4)."

But instead of our regarding sin with the abhorrence it deserves, I am constrained to show you,

II. What great indulgence sin meets with at our hands.

View the generality of men.

So far from abhorring sin, they love it, they delight in it, and, to use the strong expression of Scripture, "they wallow in sin, even as a sow wallows in the mire! [2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.22)."

In fact, sin is the very element in which men live. Look all around you—I speak not of those who "run into every excess of riot;" though they, alas! are very numerous, and, for the most part, "glory in their shame;" but I speak of the great mass of the community, the rich, the poor, the old, the young. Whom among them do you find regulating themselves according to God's holy Law? Who has not a standard of his own, such as custom and fashion have prescribed? And who is not satisfied with conforming to that, without ever once thinking of God's Law, or so much as desiring to approve himself to God? Truly, "the world lies in wickedness," and under the dominion of the Wicked one! [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19). [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2).

But, passing by these, behold the more decent part of the community.

Doubtless there are many who are more decorous in their conduct, and more observant of a form of godliness. But I ask, even in reference to them, How many of them do really view sin as God views it? That some enormous evils are abhorred, I readily acknowledge; but they are such only as, by a kind of common consent, are stamped with general reprobation.

As for sin, as sin, and as a departure from God's holy Law—do not the many:  
hear it, without offence;  
and see it, without disgust;  
and harbor it, without remorse?

Let these questions sink down into your ears. Carry them home with you, as tests of your real state before God. Bring them home to your conscience, and give an answer to them as before God. You well know, that if anyone loaded our parents with deep and unmerited disgrace, he would soon excite our indignation.

You know, also, that the sight and smell of a putrid carcass would create in us a loathing which we could scarcely endure. Nor need you be told, what feelings of remorse would follow the commission of murder.

But sin, whether heard or seen or felt—begets in us no such painful emotions.

To abhor sin, and "abhor ourselves" for the hidden workings of it in our souls, as holy Job did, [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)—we know nothing this response to sin.

To "loath ourselves" as hateful and abominable on account of it, [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31), so as to "blush and be confounded before God," and scarcely to "dare to lift up our eyes to Heaven" on account of our conscious vileness, [Luke 18:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.13)—is a state of mind to which we are utter strangers; unless on account of some great iniquity, which, if known, would expose us to indelible disgrace.

To abhor sin merely on account of its intrinsic hatefulness, and its offensiveness to God—is an attainment very rare, and even in the best of men very weak and imperfect. I think, then, that every one of us may consider himself as condemned in my text, and may take shame to himself as bearing that humiliating character, "he does not abhor evil!"

See, then:

1. How little there is of true holiness among us.

Of the saints of old it was said, "They could not bear those who were evil, [Revelation 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.2);" whereas we can "find pleasure in their society, [Romans 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.32)," and, provided they wrap up their jests in elegant allusions and witty turns, we can join with them in laughing at thoughts, which, if delivered in coarser language, we would condemn; we even "set ourselves in an evil way," showing no aversion to "have fellowship in the works of darkness, which we ought rather with decided boldness to reprove, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11)." How unlike we are to David, who says, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes, because men keep not your Law, [Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.136)." Indeed, brethren, we should see and mourn over our great defects; and, instead of indulging self-complacent thoughts on account of our not being so bad as others, should rather smite on our bosoms with conscious guilt, and humble ourselves before God as "the very chief of sinners!"

2. How greatly we need the provisions of the Gospel.

I have before said, that, to remedy the evils which sin has brought into the world, God has sent his only dear Son to make atonement for us, and his Holy Spirit to renew us after the divine image. And now I ask you: Whether anything less than this would have sufficed? What could you have done to expiate your own guilt? Or how could you ever, with such polluted hearts as yours, have attained a fitness for Heaven? You might as easily have built a world out of nothing, as have effected either of these things.

Nor is there any difference between one man and another in these respects. One may differ from another in respect of outward sin; but in respect of alienation of heart from the holy Law of God, and an utter incapacity to restore ourselves to his favor—all are on a perfect level. I entreat you, then, all of you without exception, to "wash in the Fountain opened for sin and for impurity, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1)," and to cry mightily to God for the renewing influences of his Holy Spirit, so that you may have your past iniquities forgiven, and be "created anew after the divine image in righteousness and true holiness! [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)." Then will you be brought to that state which every true Christian must attain, "abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good, [Romans 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.9);" and then will God be glorified in you, both in this world and in the world to come! [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10).

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GOD'S WORD AND WORKS MYSTERIOUS

**[Psalm 36:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.6)**

"Your judgments are a great deep!"

We little think how highly privileged the lowest Christian is above all the sages of antiquity. The greatest philosophers of Greece and Rome were un able to account for the existence of moral evil upon earth, or to see through the disorder and confusion which it has produced throughout the world. But the servant of the Lord is instructed to trace everything to an All-wise and Almighty Power, who brings light out of darkness and order from confusion, and overrules everything for the glory of his own name. To this Divine Being, the child of God has recourse in all his difficulties, and in the contemplation of Him finds comfort under the sorest trials.

David, under the persecutions of Saul, was reduced to the greatest extremities; but, after complaining of the subtlety of his implacable enemy, "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God," who was able to accomplish his own gracious designs, not only in opposition to this powerful adversary, but by the very means which Saul was using to defeat them.

The word "judgments" has, in Scripture, many different significations. As used in my text, we may consider it as comprehending both the Word and the works of God. In illustration, therefore, of our text, we may observe that :

I. God's judgments are a great deep, **as displayed in his Word**.

The whole of Revelation is a mystery. But, that we may not be led over too wide a field, we will confine our attention to two points:

1. Our fall in Adam.

This is a fact to which the whole Scripture bears witness, "In Adam all died. [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.22);" and "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, [Romans 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.17-18)."

Now, that Adam should himself be drawn into sin, circumstanced as he was, perfect in his nature, and supplied with everything which his soul could desire, is astonishing. But it is a fact that he did commit sin, and brought upon himself God's righteous indignation.

That in his sin all his posterity should be involved, is a yet deeper mystery; for which it would be impossible for us to account, if God had not plainly and unequivocally revealed it. That the world is full of sin, is obvious to the most superficial observer. That the very nature of man is corrupt, is also evident. No one who has ever marked the dispositions of an infant can entertain a doubt that the very nature of man is altogether corrupt! [Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.5).

But was man first created in such a state? Can we conceive of a holy Being forming, in the first instance, such unholy creatures? Human wisdom is altogether lost, and confounded, while occupied on this mysterious subject. But God has explained it to us in his Word. He has told us, what, when revealed, is a self-evident truth, that "no man can bring a clean thing out of an impure thing, [Job 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.4)." He has told us, also, what we could never have imagined or conceived, that the very guilt of Adam is transmitted to us, because he was not a private and isolated individual, but the head and representative of all his descendants; so that we come into the world, not only corrupt creatures, but "children of wrath! [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3)."

Now say, whether this be not "a great deep." Who can comprehend it? Who is not lost in astonishment at the contemplation of it?

2. Our recovery by Jesus Christ.

That there should be a possibility of restoring man to the divine favor, is what no finite intelligence could ever have conceived! Not one of the fallen angels ever was restored; nor could the restoration of man, it might be thought, have ever been compatible with the honor of our offended God. But God contrived a way, wherein he might be "just, and yet the justifier of sinful men! [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26)." For this end he gave his only-begotten Son:  
to stand in our place,  
to bear our sins,  
to "make reconciliation for our iniquities,  
and to bring in an everlasting righteousness," wherein we might stand accepted before our God!

Well might the Apostle say, "Great is the mystery of godliness! 1 Timothy 3:16." Who can contemplate "God manifest in human flesh," and dying in the place of his own sinful and rebellious creatures—and not stand amazed at this stupendous effort of love and mercy? Truly, it far "surpasses all the knowledge" whether of men or angels. And, if it were not confirmed to us by testimony that is absolutely unquestionable, we could not but regard it altogether as "a cunningly-devised fable;" so unfathomable are the depths contained in it, and so incomprehensible the love manifested in it! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19).

II. God's judgments are a great deep, **as manifested in his works**.

1. God's works of **providence**.

These also are as inscrutable as redemption itself. Who, that surveyed Joseph in all his different scenes of woe, could ever imagine where they were conducting him, or to what they would lead? Truly there is "a wheel within a wheel, [Ezekiel 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 1.16);" and while all appears uncertainty around us, everything is working to a fixed end, even to accomplish what God himself has predicted in his Word. The smallest incidents that can be imagined are often productive of the most wonderful outcomes:

the casting of a lot, the sleepless restlessness of Ahasuerus,

the casual turning to a particular record

—to a common observer would appear as matters of trifling moment; yet on them depended the preservation of the whole Jewish people! [Esther 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 3.7); [Esther 6:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 6.1-3).

And we too, if we look back upon our past lives, may find many minute occurrences, which seemed to be of no account at the time, but which contributed in the most essential manner to influence and fix our future destinies; so that at this hour there is not one among us whose life would not serve for the illustrating of this point, and constrain him with the profoundest admiration to exclaim, "How unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

2. God's works of **grace**.

Who that had seen Paul in his unconverted state, would ever have supposed that God had designs of love towards him? Yet, when he had well near filled up the measure of his iniquities, God arrested him in his career, and made him a most distinguished monument of his mercy; insomuch that all future ages were to regard him as "a pattern," by which the extent of God's mercy might be estimated, and the hopes of penitents be encouraged! [1 Timothy 1:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.12-16).

Certainly the conduct of Onesimus towards his master Philemon must appear a very strange link in the purposes of Heaven, relative to his salvation; yet were his dishonesty and flight made use of by God as means to bring him under the ministry of Paul, and, through that, to a conversion of soul to God, and to the everlasting possession of happiness and glory! Philemon verse 15.

Not that God's designs of mercy towards him lessened in any degree the guilt which he contracted; nor is sin of any kind the less sinful on account of the use which God may make of it for the accomplishment of his own designs; for then the murderers of our blessed Lord must have been accounted the best, rather than the most guilty, of mankind. No! Sin is a deadly evil, by whoever it is committed, and whatever it may effect. but this I say, that God both does and will accomplish his own eternal counsels, in ways which no finite wisdom could have contrived, nor any finite power have brought to a successful outcome! "Truly," says the prophet, "you are a God who hides yourself [Isaiah 45:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.15)."

And so, indeed, we may all say. For who can look back upon the way in which he has been brought from his youth up even to this present moment, and especially upon the way in which he has been led to the knowledge of the Savior—and not stand amazed at "the goodness and mercy that have followed him," and at the wisdom and power that have effected such great things for him? Yes; we must all fully acquiesce in that sentiment of Zophar,  
"Can you fathom the mysteries of God?  
 Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?  
 They are higher than the heavens—what can you do?  
 They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know?  
 Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea!" [Job 11:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.7-9)

Let us, then, **learn** from hence,

1. Submission to God's will.

We may have been brought into circumstances of the most afflictive nature; but we should remember who it is that orders all things, even to the falling of a sparrow upon the ground! Men and devils may be laboring for our destruction; and God may allow them to proceed to the very utmost extremity, until, like the murderers of our Lord, they may exult in, what appears to them, the full attainment of their purpose. But God says to all of them, "Hitherto shall you come, and no farther!" It is true that "His way is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known, [Psalm 77:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.19);" but we must never forget, that though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne! [Psalm 97:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.2)." "What he does, you may not understand at present; but we shall understand hereafter, [John 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.7);" and we may be sure that at the last we shall add our testimony to that of all his saints, "He has done all things well! [Mark 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.37)."

Your way may be circuitous, and attended with great difficulties; but you will find, at last, that it was "the right way! [Psalm 107:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.7)." It is God's way—the way most conducive to your best interests, and most calculated to advance Hiss glory. Let us, then, wait to "see the end of the Lord, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11);" and, under all circumstances, say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to Him!"

2. Trust in God's Word.

In His Word is light sufficient; there we see what God will most assuredly accomplish. There may appear to be a discordance between the Word and works of God; but they will be found to harmonize at last, "nor shall one jot or tittle of his Word ever fail." Lay hold, then, on the promises of God; rest on them; plead them at the throne of his grace; and expect the accomplishment of them in due season.

But be not impatient under any delays, "If the vision tarries, wait for it;" assured that "it will not tarry" beyond the appointed time! [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3). Never, under any circumstances, say, "All these things are against me;" because God has promised that "they shall all work together for your good! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)."

Conceive of a soul just liberated from the body, and from the throne of God looking back upon the way in which it has been brought there; with what admiration will it then be filled! and what praises will it pour forth on account of the dispensations which until now it was not able to unravel!

This should now be the posture of your soul. Most safely may you trust in God to the full extent of his promises; for, whatever difficulties may lie in his way, "His counsel shall stand; and He will do all his will!"

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THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD

**[Psalm 36:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.7-8)**

"How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights!"

The more we know of man—the more shall we see the folly of trusting in an arm of flesh. But, the more we are acquainted with God—the more enlarged will be our expectations from him, and the more unreserved will be our confidence in his power and grace. David had found by bitter experience, that no dependence could be placed on the protestations of Saul. But David had a Friend, in whose protection he could trust; and in the contemplation of whose character he could find the richest consolation, while his views of man filled him with nothing but grief and anguish. Having expatiated upon God's perfections, as contrasted with the deceitfulness and depravity of man, David bursts forth into a rapturous admiration of his love.

His words furnish us with an occasion to consider the loving-kindness of God, in the precise view in which it is exhibited in our text,

I. The loving-kindness of God, as **a subject for adoring gratitude**.

Wherever we turn our eyes, we behold the most astonishing displays of God's love.

Every work of Creation,  
every dispensation of Providence,  
every effort of Grace,  
exhibits him to us in the most endearing view.

But most of all must we admire the wonders of redemption. This is the work whereby God commends his love to us, [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.8). This is the one subject of adoration to all the saints in glory, [Revelation 5:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-14). No sooner was it declared in the incarnation of Christ, than multitudes of the heavenly host began a new song, singing "Glory to God in the highest! [Luke 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.13-14)." Yes, from that moment have they been occupied in exploring the mysteries of God's loving-kindness, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12).

So unsearchable are its heights and depths, that no finite understanding can fully comprehend, nor will eternity suffice to unfold, all the wonders contained in it, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19). "How excellent then is your loving-kindness, O God!"

II. The loving-kindness of God, **as a ground for implicit confidence**.

This is not a speculative subject, but is influential in the hearts of all that give it a due measure of their attention. It is this which encourages sinners to approach their God with confidence. In the view of this, no guilt appals, no trial depresses, no grief dejects. Whatever we lack of pardon, peace, or strength, one thought suffices to support the soul, "he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things! [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32)."

This is the genuine and legitimate use which we are to make of the loving-kindness of God, [Psalm 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.10).

We are to go to him as to a Father, confessing our faults, [Luke 15:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.18-19).

We are to to follow him as our Guide in all our ways [Hebrews 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8).

We are to to commit ourselves to him as our King, without fear, knowing that he will either extricate us from all trouble, [Daniel 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.17), or overrule it for our good, [Philippians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.19-20). [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19).

III. The loving-kindness of God, **as a pledge of all imaginable blessings at his hands**.

There is nothing which can conduce to our happiness either in time or eternity, which we are not warranted to expect at God's hands—provided we contemplate, and be suitably impressed with, the excellencies of his love.

The priests of old feasted their families with the offerings which belonged to them by virtue of their office, [Numbers 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.11). Now to our great High-Priest belong all the glory and blessedness of Heaven; and every member of his family is privileged to partake with him. In his house he spreads his feast, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6), and says to his dear children: Come and drink abundantly, O beloved! [Song of Solomon 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.1), and let your souls delight themselves with fatness, [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2). And who can declare what "abundant satisfaction" their souls feel while feeding on the promises of his Word, and the communications of his love; or how enviable is the state of those who are thus highly privileged, [Psalm 65:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.4). Surely if we taste this promised blessing, [Jeremiah 31:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.14), we may well desire rather to be door-keepers in his house, than to enjoy the splendor of an earthly court! [Psalm 84:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10).

But there are still sweeter fruits of God's love to be enjoyed in Heaven. There flows a river, which gladdens that holy city, the new Jerusalem, [Psalm 46:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.4), and fills with unspeakable delight every inhabitant of those blissful mansions! There is a fullness of joy, emanating from the fountain of God, and filling with God's own blessedness every soul according to its capacity, [Revelation 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.1) and [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11). Of this shall every one be "made to drink;" and, drinking of it, shall thirst no more forever! [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15).

APPLICATION.

Let the love of God in Christ Jesus be our meditation all the day.

Let it lead us to trust in him both for body and soul.

Let a sense of it shed abroad in our hearts, be the one object of our desire, [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4). and delight, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8).

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CHRIST THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE AND LIGHT

**[Psalm 36:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.9)**

"With you is the fountain of life; in your light shall we see light!"

By a sober consideration of Scripture metaphors we obtain a more full and comprehensive knowledge of divine truth, than could easily be obtained from the most labored discussions. Besides, the ideas suggested by them strike the mind so forcibly, that they cannot fail of making a deep and lasting impression. Let us but notice the rich variety of figures whereby God is set forth in the passage before us, and we shall be filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of his goodness.

The Psalmist, illustrating the loving-kindness of his God, represents him:

first under the image of a hen gathering her chicks;

then as an opulent host feasting his guests with the richest dainties;

and then, in a beautiful climax, he compares him to the sun.

In our text there is no confusion of metaphor, as there would be if the former part referred to a fountain, and the latter to the sun. It is the sun alone that is spoken of; for that is the fountain both of light and life; and in discoursing upon it, we observe, that,

I. Christ is an inexhaustible source of all spiritual good.

Christ may be considered as peculiarly referred to in the metaphor before us.

It is in Christ alone that the perfections mentioned in the foregoing verses are combined, verse 5, 6. It is in him alone that God unites justice with mercy, [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26), or adheres, in faithfulness, to his covenant engagements, [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20). Besides, it is in this view that Christ is set forth throughout all the sacred oracles, by prophets, [Isaiah 60:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.1). [Malachi 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.2), by Apostles [John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.4); [John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.9). [Luke 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.32). [2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19), and more especially by himself, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12); [John 12:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.46). We may well therefore apply to him the comparison before us; and we shall find it admirably descriptive of his real character.

Christ is to the spiritual world, what the sun is to the material, world.

The sun is "the fountain of light and life" to this lower world. When that is withdrawn, the earth is left in darkness, the vegetable world decays, and myriads of animals are secluded in a state of torpor. But when it returns in its brightness, it both dispels the darkness, and restores to nature her suspended powers.

Thus, where Christ has not shined, universal darkness and death prevail. But when he arises on the soul—he enlightens it, and infuses into it a principle of life, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1), whereby its faculties are made capable of spiritual exertions; and it is rendered "fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness to God's praise and glory".

We have abundant encouragement to seek his influence, since,

II. Those who live in communion with him shall surely participate in his blessings.

As the sun shines in vain to him who secludes himself in a dungeon, so, unless we come forth to "Christ's light, we cannot possibly behold his light." But if we view him as we ought, we shall then attain:  
the light of knowledge,  
the light of comfort,  
the light of holiness,  
the light of glory.

1. Our minds shall be enlightened with **divine knowledge**.

By the light of the sun we behold the objects around us; and by the light of Christ we discern the things belonging to our peace. In his face all the glory of the Godhead shines, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6). [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15), insomuch that he who has seen him, has seen the Father also, [John 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.9). Nor is there any one subject relating to salvation which does not receive its clearest illustration from him.

2. Our souls shall be enriched with **heavenly comfort**.

The consolation we derive from other sources is unsubstantial; and the things which promise us most happiness, often prove only a fleeting meteor, or a delusive vapor.

But a sight of Christ, of his fullness, his suitableness, his all-sufficiency—affords a ground of comfort, as firm as the rocks, and as lasting as eternity! [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5).

3. Our hearts shall be "**renewed in righteousness and true holiness**".

Nothing produces such effects as a sight of Christ! We may hear the law proclaimed in all its terrors, and yet experience no abiding change. But a God-given view of Christ as crucified for us will:  
break the most obdurate heart, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)  
raise the most desponding soul, [1 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3)  
inspire the selfish with unbounded love, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16)  
and fill the mourner with unutterable joy! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8).

In a word, it will change a sinful man into the very image of his God and Savior [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

4. The light of **glory** itself shall also be enjoyed by us.

Christ is the one source of happiness to all the hosts of Heaven! [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23).

To behold his beauty,  
to taste his love,  
to celebrate his praises  
—this is their employment, this is their supreme felicity! [Revelation 5:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8-13). Such too is the occupation, such the happiness of every true believer—he has a pledge of Heaven in his soul that, in due season, he shall receive the consummation of all his wishes in the immediate vision of his Savior's glory, and the everlasting fruition of his love! [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14) and [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2).

Inferences:

1. How great is the folly of seeking happiness in the creature!

Created things, in comparison with Christ, are no more than a broken cistern to a fountain, [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13); or than a star in comparison with the meridian sun. Let us then seek our happiness in Christ, and in him alone. In him, as in the sun, there is a fullness and a sufficiency for all! [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19). And to him all may have access, if they will not obstinately immure themselves in impenitence and unbelief, [Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14). Let us not then "kindle sparks for ourselves, or walk in the light of our own fires, [Isaiah 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11)," but "come forth to his light," and "walk in it" to the last hour of our lives! [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36).

2. How unspeakable is the blessedness of knowing Christ!

If we could conceive ourselves in a region where a winter's midnight was perpetuated; and then be transported in idea to a climate, where noontide light, and spring beauty, were uninterruptedly enjoyed—then we might have some faint image of the change effected by the knowledge of Christ, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9), Truly the Christian is in Goshen, [Exodus 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.26); [Exodus 10:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.22-23). Or if, for a little moment he is in darkness, there arises up a light unto him in the midst of it, [Psalm 112:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.4), and his darkness becomes as the noon-day, [Isaiah 58:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10). And, in a little time "his sun shall no more go down; but his Lord shall be unto him an everlasting light, and his God shall be his glory! [Isaiah 60:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19-20)." O that this may be the constant pursuit, and the happy attainment of us all!

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GOD'S CONTINUED CARE IMPLORED

**[Psalm 36:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.10)**

"O continue your loving-kindness unto those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright in heart!"

David, in all his troubles, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." He was in great trouble at the time he wrote this Psalm; but whether from the persecutions of Saul, or the rebellion of Absalom, is not certain. But his views of God were exceeding grand, "Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light! [Psalm 36:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.5-9)."

To this God David commits his cause; and, in behalf of himself and all his persecuted associates, prays, "O continue your loving-kindness unto those who know you, and your righteousness unto the upright in heart!"

The same petition will every faithful minister urge in behalf of himself and his people, under a full assurance that "all their fresh springs are in God! [Psalm 87:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.7);" and if ever they are saved at all, that God himself must "work all their works in them, [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12)." In this view, I will endeavor to show you,

I. What need, we all have of the blessing here implored.

The term "righteousness," in the Old Testament, is of very extensive meaning. In my text it imports "goodness," and, as joined with "loving-kindness," must be understood to mean, a continuance of God's tender and watchful care even to the end.

Of God's tender and watchful care, all people, whatever their attainments are, stand in need.

Of the unbelieving and ungodly I am not at present called to speak; but rather of "those who know God, and are upright before him." Now all of these, without any exception, "offend God in many things," and, "if God were extreme to mark what is done amiss, must perish." From gross and willful transgressions they may be free; but "who can say, His heart is clean?" How many sins are committed there, which no eye but God's beholds!

But, waving sins of commission, how greatly do we offend in a way of omission! See how "exceeding broad are the demands of God's Law." Our duties to God, our neighbor, and ourselves—who can be said perfectly to know them all; and much less to do them.

But, waving these also, let us mark only our sins of defect.

We do really love God; but do we love him "with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength?"

We love our neighbor, too; but do we love him with the same intenseness, and constancy, and activity "as ourselves?"

We believe in Christ also; but is our habit of dependence on him, and communion with him, like that of "a branch united to the vine?"

We devote ourselves to his service; but are all our faculties and powers, both of mind and body, put forth into action, as if we were running a race, or fighting for our lives?

Let us look at our very best services, whether in public or in private. Our prayers, for instance:

Are our confessions accompanied with that brokenness of heart which we ought to feel?

Are our petitions urged with that importunity which God requires?

Are our thanksgivings presented with that ardent gratitude which God's mercies, and especially the great blessings of redemption, call for at our hands?

I must say, that the grossest iniquities of the ungodly do not, in my apprehension, more strongly mark our alienation from God, than do the very prayers and praises of the godly; so exceeding cold are they, and unsuited to our state as redeemed sinners!

We need, therefore, the continuance of God's tender mercies to us yet daily, as much as ever we did in our carnal and unregenerate state!

And what would we do, if God should withdraw his tender and watchful care from us?

What would our "knowledge of God" avail us, or even our own "integrity?" Satan prevailed over our first parents, even in Paradise; how, then, could we withstand his power, if God should deliver us up into his hands?

In point of knowledge and integrity, David was as eminent as any of the Scripture saints; yet you all know what happened when once he was left to the workings of his own heart.

Hezekiah was perhaps not inferior to him; yet, when "God left him, to try him, that he might see all that was in his heart," Hezekiah also fell, and brought upon himself and his posterity the sorest judgments! [2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.31).

Who then among us could hope to stand, if God should withhold his loving-kindness from us, or suspend for a moment the communications of his grace?

We need, then, all of us to entreat of God to "continue his loving-kindness to us!" You all know how a rope, or line, or thread, is formed, by adding fresh materials continually, until it shall have attained its destined length. In reference to this, the prophet represents the ungodly as "drawing out iniquity as cords of vanity, and sin as a cart-rope, [Isaiah 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.18)," that is, by constant additions even to their dying hour. And precisely thus we need, that God who has begun a good work in us, should carry it on even to the end, by drawing out, and imparting to us, such communications of his grace as our necessities require, until we have attained that measure which in his eternal counsels he has ordained, and we be fully "fit for our Master's use."

Seeing, then, that we all need this blessing, let me show you,

II. On what grounds all "who know God, and are upright before him," are authorized to expect God's tender and watchful care.

The petition in my text was offered under a full assurance that it would be granted; for David had scarcely uttered it before he saw, by faith, the answer given, "There," says he, "are the workers of iniquity fallen; they are cast down, and shall not be able to stand." And we also may expect that it shall be answered to all who offer it in faith.

1. We may expect God's continued care, since it is assured to us **by the promises of God**.

Numberless are the promises which God has made to us respecting the continuance of his love towards all whom, according to his sovereign will, he has chosen to be the objects of it.

David, in another Psalm, says, "The Lord will not cast off his People, neither will he forsake his inheritance, [Psalm 94:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.14)." And again, "From everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts! [Psalm 103:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.17-18)."

In fact, the whole Scripture testifies that God will perfect that which concerns his people, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8); and that, having loved them, he will love them to the end! [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1). Taking, therefore, these promises, we may spread them before the Lord, in full assurance that they shall be fulfilled; and in the language of David we may say to God, "O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief! [Psalm 143:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.1)."

2. We may expect God's continued care, since it is assured to us **by the intercession of Christ**.

The apostle John has said, "If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins! [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1-2)." Yes, were it not that the Lord Jesus Christ lives to intercede for us in Heaven, it could not be but that God's displeasure must break forth against us on ten thousand occasions! But he prevails for us, as Aaron prevailed for Israel of old, through his unwearied intercessions. To this Peter was indebted, when he denied his Lord with oaths and curses. Had not our blessed Lord interceded for him, that his faith might not fail—then he, in all probability, would have perished as Judas did, [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32). In this view, a greater stress is laid on the intercession of Christ than even on his death, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died; yes, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God, who also makes intercession for us! [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34)." We are encouraged to believe that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for us! [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)." Put then your cause into the Savior's hands; and beg of him to pray to the Father for you," and you cannot but succeed, "for the Father hears Jesus always!"

3. We may expect God's continued care, since it is assured to us **by the honor of God himself**.

God from all eternity entered into covenant with his dear Son in our behalf, engaging, that "Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand! [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." This covenant our blessed Lord has fulfilled on his part, having taken our nature, and "borne our sins in his own body on the tree." And while yet he was upon earth, he made this a ground of his petitions, and a ground also of his expectations, in behalf of his people, "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one! [John 17:9-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.9-15)." Then he adds, what insures to us the completion of his desires, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world! [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24)."

Now I ask, Is not here abundant ground to expect God's continued care of his people? May we not from hence "be confident, that He who has begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ? [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." Yes, surely; and therefore when David, under the influence of unbelief, had entertained a fear, "Will the Lord cast off forever? will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? does his promise fail for evermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" he corrected himself, and with conscious shame exclaimed, "This is my infirmity! [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9)." We may be sure that God's covenant shall stand. In the 89th Psalm it is declared, again, and again, and again, in terms the most express that can be imagined! [Psalm 89:28-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.28-37); and therefore we may be assured that for his own name and honor sake "he will keep his people by his own power through faith unto salvation, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5);" as it was said by Samuel, "The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake, because it has pleased him to make you his people! [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22)."

"He is a God that changes not; and therefore we neither are, nor shall be, consumed! [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6)." We shall be living witnesses for him to all eternity, that "his gifts and calling are without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)."

APPLICATION.

1. Seek to answer to the character here described.

If you "know not God," you can have no claim upon him; nor, "unless you are upright in heart," have you any reason to hope that he will ever look upon you with satisfaction. You must "have your hearts right with God," if ever you would be approved of God. Seek, then, to know God as reconciled to you in Christ Jesus; and beg of him so to "put truth in your inward parts," that he may acknowledge and commend you as "Israelites indeed, in whom is no deceit."

2. Implore the blessings from God which you so greatly need.

You need God's blessings, all of you, and will need them to your dying hour! It is from God that you have received all that you possess. Never would you have known him, if he had not opened the eyes of your understanding, and revealed himself to you, Compare [Galatians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.9) with [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12). And never would your heart have been upright before him, if he, of his own sovereign grace, had not "given you a new heart, and renewed a right spirit within you." It is to Him, then, you must look to carry on the work within you. "No hands but His who laid the foundation of his spiritual temple within you, can ever finish it! [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.9)." "He alone who has been the author of your faith, can ever complete it, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)."

3. While you seek these blessings for yourselves, implore it them earnestly for others also.

So did David, under all his trials; and so should you. It is our privilege and our duty to intercede for one another; parents for their children, and children for their parents; ministers for their people, and people for their ministers. And, O! what happiness should we enjoy in our respective families, and in the Church of God, if we were all partakers of these blessings! It is said in the very words before my text, "With you is the fountain of life; and in Your light shall we see light;" and no doubt, in proportion as the blessings of salvation flow down into our souls—we shall be blessed in ourselves, and blessings to all around us!

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CONFIDENCE IN GOD RECOMMENDED

**[Psalm 37:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.3-6)**

"Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

It might be supposed that God, the righteous Governor of the universe, would in this world distinguish his people from his enemies by his visible dispensations towards them; but he does not; he allows "all things to come alike to all, [Ecclesiastes 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.1-2)." This is often a stumbling-block to the righteous, who are apt to be discouraged, when they see the prosperity of the wicked, and are themselves suffering all manner of adversity. David was at one time greatly dejected, or rather, I should say, offended, at this very thing; and was led to imagine that he had served God for nothing, [Psalm 73:1-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.1-14). To guard us against such mistaken views of providence, and against the feelings which they are accustomed to excite in the bosom, he wrote this Psalm. That we may not repine at the success of evil-doers, he teaches us to consider how short their triumph is, and how awful will be their end. He then, in the words of our text, instructs us,

I. What we are to do for God.

It is here taken for granted that we have many difficulties to contend with. But instead of being discouraged by them, our duty to God is:

1. To go on steadily in God's service.

"Trust in the Lord, and do good." It should be an established principle in our hearts, that *duty* is ours, and *outcomes* are God's. We should attend to our own concerns, and leave God to his.

Now beyond all doubt our great concern is to prosecute and "finish the work which God has given us to do." We should not merely attend to good works in general, but consider what is that particular "good" which God is calling us to do; perhaps it is to exercise meekness and patience; or perhaps to put forth fortitude and firmness. In the event of persecution for righteousness' sake, these graces must be cultivated with more than ordinary attention, and be called into action in a more than ordinary degree. We are not to be perplexing our minds with inquiries how we may avert the storm which is gathering around us, but be solely careful not to be shaken either in our principles or conduct, or in any respect to dishonor that God whom we profess to serve. Without this fidelity in the path of duty, all trust in God will be a delusion; but, combined with it, our trust in him is a most pleasing and acceptable service.

2. To seek our happiness in God's presence.

Fidelity itself would not be acceptable, if it proceeded from a principle of slavish fear—we must regard God as a Father, and "delight ourselves in him." It is not a low measure of spirituality that we should aim at; we should aspire after such an enjoyment of God as David himself spoke of, when he said, "I will go unto God, my exceeding joy! [Psalm 43:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 43.4)." In order to this, we should meditate upon all his glorious perfections, and especially on those perfections as displayed and magnified in the work of redemption. O! what wonders of love and mercy may we see in our incarnate, our redeeming God! In the contemplation of these we should exercise ourselves day and night, until the fire kindle in our bosoms, and we burst forth in acclamations and hosannahs to our adorable Emmanuel. Say, you who have ever been so occupied, whether such "meditations be not sweet;" and whether "your souls have not been satisfied as with marrow and fatness," when you have been so employed?

3. To commit our every concern to God's disposal.

Our duty in this respect may not unfitly be illustrated by the confidence which passengers in a ship place in a skillful pilot and an able commander. They trust their persons and their property to the pilot without any anxious cares or painful apprehensions. Conscious of their own incapacity to navigate the ship, they presume not to interfere in the management of the vessel, but leave the whole concern to those whose province it is to conduct it. Whatever storms may arise, they look to him who is at the helm to steer the vessel to its destined port.

Thus does the believer commit his way unto the Lord. To God he looks as ordering every thing for his good; yes, as having, if we may so speak, a community of interest with him, and as pledged to bring him in safety to the harbor where he would be. If any anxious thought arises, he checks it; and "casts all his care on Him, who cares for him." This we should do in reference to every concern whatever. In relation to temporal things, we should have no more anxiety than the birds of the air, which exist from day to day on the bounty of their Creator! [Matthew 6:25-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.25-34). And even in reference to the soul, the same entire confidence must be placed in God, who has engaged to carry on and perfect in his people the work he has begun, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6). Let us not however be misunderstood to say, that we are to put away a jealous fear of ourselves; that we must retain even to the end of our lives. But an unbelieving fear of God, as either unable or unwilling to save us, we must cast it off with abhorrence, and "be strong in faith, giving glory to God."

The promises annexed to these several injunctions show,

II. What God will do for us.

Truly he will do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think.

1. God will supply our needs.

Great and urgent they may be, even like those with which Israel was oppressed on different occasions in the land of Canaan; but God will interpose for us in the hour of need, so that "truly we shall be fed." Under the pressure of their troubles, many Jews deserted their own land, and sought for security or plenty among their heathen neighbors; thus they rather fled from trouble, than looked to God, as they should have done, to relieve them from it. We must not act thus; we must not desert our post because of difficulties which we meet with in it; but must expect from God all those supplies of grace and strength which we stand in need of. "He who believes, will not make haste;" he will not presently despond, because he sees not how his needs are to be supplied; but will remember, that, as "the earth, and the fullness thereof, is the Lord's," so there is all fullness of spiritual blessings also treasured up for him in Christ, and he will look to Christ for daily communications, according as his necessities may require. The Lord did not give to Elijah a store of provision that should suffice for months to come, but sent him bread and meat twice a day by the ministration of ravens, and afterwards a daily supply from the widow's cruse.

In the same manner will he impart a sufficiency of temporal and spiritual blessings to all who trust in him; and "according to their day, so their strength shall be." "The soul that trusts in Him shall lack no good thing."

2. God will fulfill our desires.

If our desires were after the things of time and sense, we might expect to have them withheld from us; but if our desires are, as the believer's are, after God himself—then we shall never be disappointed; on the contrary, the more earnest and enlarged our desire is, the more certain we are that God will fulfill and satisfy it. The more "wide we open our mouth," the more assured we are that "he will fill it!" "He will fulfill the desire of those who fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will help them."

Do we desire increasing "views of his glory? He will put us into the cleft of the rock, and make all his goodness to pass before our eyes! [Exodus 33:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-23)."

Do we desire a more intimate and abiding communion with him? He will "come and dwell in us, and walk in us, and be altogether our God, 2 Corinthians 6:16."

Do we desire a more entire conformity to him? He will "transform us into his image from glory to glory," by the sanctifying influence of his Holy Spirit. [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

There shall not be a thing that we can ask, but he will give it to us, if only it will be conducive to our spiritual and eternal welfare, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7) and [1 John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.14-15) with [Psalm 21:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.1-2).

3. God will give a happy outcome to all our concerns.

There may be many difficulties in our way, and such as shall be to all appearance insurmountable; but He who made a path through the Red Sea, will remove them all in due time. Whatever in his wisdom he sees to be best for us, "he will bring it to pass." We may labor under many discouragements by reason of calumnies which are circulated respecting us. The world may represent us as enthusiasts that "turn the world upside down," as deceivers that are seeking some base ends of our own, as abettors of sedition, and enemies to civil government. In a word, they may speak of us as "the filth of the earth, and the off-scouring of all things;" but God will not leave us to sink under these reproaches; he will sooner or later appear for us, and "make our righteousness to shine forth as the noon-day." We shall have "good report to pass through, as well as evil report;" and our very demeanor under our persecutions shall carry conviction to the minds of many, that we are indeed the sons of God, [Matthew 27:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.54). At all events, if not before, at least at the day of judgment, our reproach shall be rolled away, and "we shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father! [Matthew 13:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.43)."

Reflections.

1. See what they lose, who are ignorant of God.

All that is implied either in the precepts or the promises of our text is altogether unknown to those who do not experience the power of saving religion in their hearts. Whatever burdens they have, are borne upon their own shoulders; they know not what it is to cast them upon the Lord. Hence, when oppressed with heavy trials, they faint and sink under them; and for lack of the consolations and supports of religion, they frequently meditate, and sometimes also carry into execution, the awful act of suicide.

O that men did but know what provision there is made for them in the Gospel of Christ! In, and with Christ—there is all that we can need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity. Only let us seek:  
to be washed in his sin-atoning blood,  
to be renewed by his Spirit,  
and to live altogether by faith in him;  
and we shall find such rich supplies, such heavenly consolations, such a fullness of all spiritual and eternal blessings—as shall far surpass all that the carnal eye has ever seen, and all that the carnal imagination has ever conceived! [1 Corinthians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9).

2. See what they enjoy, who live near to God.

Contemplate the state of those who are now in Heaven; how free from care, and how completely happy in the fruition of their God! Such in a measure may our state be even in this present world. Those who believe in Christ are privileged to rejoice in him, yes, and many do "rejoice in him, with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

By committing themselves, and all their concerns, to him, "their very thoughts, which are naturally as fluctuating as the wind, are established! [Proverbs 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.3)."

O believers, live not below your privileges; carry everything to your adorable Savior, and expect from him all that infinite love can give, and all that Omnipotence can effect! "All things are yours, if you are Christ's;" even "death itself, as well as life, is among your treasures! [1 Corinthians 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-23);" and soon shall all the glory and felicity of Heaven be your unalienable and everlasting possession!

#565

GOD'S INTEREST IN HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 37:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.23-24)**

"The steps of a godly man are ordered by the Lord; and He delights in his way. Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with his hand."

That Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, should regard one rather than another among the sinners of mankind, appears incredible; and for anyone to imagine himself to be among those who are pre-eminently favored by God, would be judged a height of arrogance, to which scarcely anyone of a sound mind could be supposed to have attained.

But the Holy Scriptures are extremely clear, and full, and definite upon this point. God condescends to notice with peculiar kindness those who walk uprightly before him; while he beholds with indignation and abhorrence those who, whether openly or in secret, rebel against him. To establish this is the great scope of this Psalm, wherein the states of the godly and of the ungodly are contrasted with each other in this respect. From the words which I have just read, we shall necessarily be led to notice:

I. The special interest which God takes in his redeemed people.

"He orders their steps".

In the marginal translation, it is said that a godly man's steps are "established" by the Lord. The fact is, the Lord so orders them, that they may be established. The very first work of the Lord in his people, is, to bring them to Christ, and to "establish them in Christ, [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44); [John 6:65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.65) and [2 Corinthians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.21)." Until this is done, they never take any step that can effectually bring them to Heaven. When that is done, then they are enabled to "walk in Christ, [Colossians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6)," and, by strength derived from him, to advance in righteousness and true holiness.

"He delights in their ways".

True, their ways are far from perfect; and, if God were to be "extreme to mark what is done amiss," no man living could stand before him. But God looks rather at the principle from whence their actions proceed, and at the end for which they are done—than at the perfection of the actions themselves; and when he sees that their actions proceed from love, and are done for the glory of his name—he cannot but feel delight, both in the people themselves, and in the works they perform; even as a parent delights in the services of a loving and duteous child, not considering so much the excellence of the act, as the disposition manifested in the performance of it.

On another ground, too, Jehovah delights in the ways of his people, namely, because they are "the fruits of his Spirit" working in them, [Galatians 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22-23). In this view there is not an act this they perform, which is "not pleasing and acceptable in his sight, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16). [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4). [Philippians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.11)."

"He upholds them with his hand".

Notwithstanding the grace given unto them, they are yet weak and frail, so that "still in many things they sin, [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2);" and, if left to themselves, they would eternally perish. "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins, [Ecclesiastes 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.20)." But in this the righteous differ from the wicked, that, notwithstanding the godly fall, yes, and "fall seven times—they rise again; while the wicked, in their falls, are left to perish! [Proverbs 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.16)." The Lord Jesus Christ has engaged for them that "none shall ever pluck them out of his hands! [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)." And this is fulfilled to every one of them, insomuch, that "of those whom the Father in his everlasting covenant gave unto his Son, not one ever was, or shall be, lost! [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12)." They all, in their respective generations, are "kept by the power of God through faith unto everlasting salvation! [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)."

These truths can never be abused, if we consider, on the other hand,

II. What return God looks for from his redeemed people.

Though all good proceeds from God—yet he expects a reciprocity on our part. "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose!" [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13)

1. We must cheerfully obey his will.

We take no step by constraint. We are free agents in all that we do. True it is that God draws us; but he draws us, not as stocks and stones, but "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love! [Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.4)." If we would have our ways pleasing to God, we must seek to please him; and if we would have our "steps ordered and established by him," we must consult his revealed will, and commit ourselves to the guidance of his Holy Spirit. He has promised, that, in circumstances of difficulty, "we shall hear a word behind us, saying: This is the way—walk in it; when we should otherwise be turning to the right hand or to the left, [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21);" and this promise we must plead in prayer, until, by some way which God shall devise, we see, as it were, the pillar and the cloud going before us, and experience that direction which our necessities require.

2. We must simply depend on God's care.

"It is not in man who walks to direct his steps." A little infant does not more need to be carried in its mother's arms, than we need the continual support of God! But he promises that "his everlasting arms shall be underneath us! [Deuteronomy 33:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.27)," and that we shall be "carried as lambs in the bosom of our Lord [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11)."

But in order to this, we must renounce all confidence in our own powers, and say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

If, like Peter, we depend on ourselves—then we shall fall; but, if we cry habitually to him, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117)," we shall be strengthened with might by his Spirit in our inward man, and be enabled to "do all things through Christ strengthening us, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

The weaker we are in ourselves, the stronger we shall be in him, 2 Corinthians 12:10; and, though we are "sifted by Satan" with his utmost efforts, [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31), "not so much as the smallest grain shall ever fall upon the earth, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9)." For "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish! [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14)."

Address,

1. To the self-confident and secure.

Where do you find in the Holy Scriptures anyone of these promises made to you? Where has God engaged to "order your steps," or declared himself "delighted with your ways?" Or where has he assured you that your falls shall not be unto death? Not one word is there in all the inspired volume that can serve as a foundation of hope to you, while you are leaning to your own understanding, or depending on an arm of flesh! On the contrary, there is nothing but perdition denounced against you, [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-6).

Beloved brethren, do but contrast with your condition the states of God's believing and obedient people; and you will see, that they alone are blessed, whose hearts are upright, and "whose God is the Lord."

2. To the fearful and disconsolate.

Many, under a sense of their great infirmities, are ready to fear, that, notwithstanding all that God has spoken for their encouragement, they shall come short at last. But, if only you really desire to please and serve God—then see how full and suitable are the promises of God to you, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10)."

Are you weak? God says, "I will strengthen you."

Are you apprehensive that nothing less than Omnipotence can administer sufficient aid? God adds, "I will help you."

Are you still alarmed because there is something yet left for you to do? God adds, I will take the whole matter into my own hands, and "altogether uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness."

"Be strong, then, in faith, giving glory to God;" and "you shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end!"

#566

THE SECURITY OF THE UPRIGHT SOUL

**[Psalm 37:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.31)**

"The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide."

The blessedness of the righteous is a favorite subject with the sweet singer of Israel; several of his Psalms are occupied with it throughout; and often in a way of immediate contrast with the state of the ungodly. As far as respects the outward appearance indeed, the advantage is often on the side of the wicked verse 1; but on a fuller view of their respective states, there will be found the most abundant cause to encourage the saints even in their lowest condition, so infinitely superior is their lot to that of the most prosperous of ungodly men! verse 16.

The ungodly, walking after the imagination of their own hearts, have "their way dark and slippery," so that, sooner or later, they are sure to "fall" and "perish, [Psalm 35:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.6-8) with verse 13-15, 20;" but the "righteous," having their minds intent upon true wisdom, "are preserved, while the seed of the wicked are cut off, verse 28, 30." "The law of God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide."

From these words we shall be led to show:

I. The **character** of the righteous.

"The law of God is in his heart." It was not there by nature; for though it was originally inscribed on the heart of Adam in Paradise, [Genesis 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.27), and traces of it are yet to be found on the hearts even of the benighted heathen, [Romans 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.15)—yet is it so far effaced from the heart of the natural man, that he neither does nor will yield any subjection to it, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7). But,

God has engraved His Law on the hearts of the righteous.

The express promise of God to all who embrace the new covenant is, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, [Jeremiah 31:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.33)." And this promise he fulfills, through the all-powerful operation of his Holy Spirit upon their souls. As he caused Moses to come up to him on Mount Horeb with tablets of stone, on which with his own finger he wrote the law, so he causes the believing penitent to come up to him with his heart of stone; and then, exchanging it for a heart of flesh, he inscribes upon it his law, even, as the Apostle says, upon the fleshy tablets of his heart, [Ezekiel 36:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26-27) with [2 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.3). We are told respecting all the Lord's people, that they are "predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29);" and in this their conformity to him pre-eminently appears; that, as He could say, "I delight to do your will, O my God. Yes, your law is within my heart! [Psalm 40:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.8)." And as he was typically represented by the ark in which the law was deposited, [Deuteronomy 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.2); [Deuteronomy 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.5), so these have the law treasured up in their souls; and they delight in it, as their ever-faithful monitor, and infallible directory, [Psalm 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.2). From the time that it is deposited there, they regard it solely, constantly, and without reserve. Formerly the opinions of men, or the dictates of flesh and blood, formed their rule of action; now no inquiry is made, but, "What says the Lord?"; Nor is it on great emergencies only that this inquiry is instituted, but at all times and on all occasions; Nor are consequences any longer regarded. If a furnace or den of lions be prepared as the recompense of fidelity, he says, "None of these things move me;" I shall "hearken unto none but God" himself.

This forms his distinguishing character.

Others have the law of God in their head, and frequently in their mouth also—but the true Christian alone has it in his heart. There may be among the ungodly as comprehensive a knowledge of theology as of any other science, if taken in a mere speculative view; but this is widely different from a spiritual apprehension of God's law, and a conformity of mind and will to it; this pertains to him only who has it written on his heart by the Spirit of God; for so the prophet informs us, "Hearken unto me, you that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law, [Isaiah 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.7)." To know, in a speculative way, how a sinner is to be made righteous before God, will consist with the grossest impiety; but the having of God's law in the heart infallibly designates, and proves, us the people of the Lord.

There is in this respect the same difference between the nominal and the real Christian as there was formerly between different adherents to the Mosaic law. "All were not Israel who were of Israel, [Romans 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6)." The proudest Pharisees would "bind the law of God upon their hands, and wear it as frontlets between their eyes;" but the godly alone fulfilled the true intent of that ordinance, by "laying up God's Word in their heart and in their soul, [Deuteronomy 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18)." So now "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart; in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of man, but of God, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29)."

In other words, he only is truly righteous, who can say with Paul, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man;" and amidst all the temptations of the flesh, "with my mind I serve the law of God, [Romans 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22); [Romans 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.25)."

In connection with their character, we are led to contemplate,

II. The **security** of the righteous.

"None of their steps shall slide." Of this they may be assured; for a stability is, and shall be, given them, that shall preserve them amidst all temptations; a stability arising:

1. Partly, their security stems from **the godly character which they possess**.

"The law of God being in their hearts," they will not unnecessarily venture themselves in slippery places. How many fall a prey to the tempter by presuming upon their strength, when, like Joseph, they should rather have fled from the scene of temptation! It is by going fearlessly to the utmost verge of what is lawful, that thousands perish! The inquiry of a truly pious soul will not be, "Is this thing lawful?" But, "Is it beneficial also?" And, if the place, or scene, or gratification is calculated, either in itself or in its circumstances, to ensnare his soul, he will keep at a distance from it; for, while he is praying daily to God, "Lead us not into temptation," he accounts it folly and impiety to rush unnecessarily into temptation of his own accord. This cautious deportment tends greatly to the preservation of the godly, and to "keep them from defiling their garments" in this polluted world! [Revelation 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.4).

Moreover, they are looking to this law to direct their steps. They "have hidden it within their hearts, on purpose that they may not sin against God, [Psalm 119:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.11);" but to what purpose have they deposited it there, if they do not consult it? or "with which shall they cleanse their way, but by taking heed thereunto according to God's Word, [Psalm 119:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.9)." Whatever then they are solicited to do, they bring it to this touchstone, and try it "by the law and the testimony."

If they do not find the precept clear, they hesitate; and, if they do not find the footsteps of Christ and his Apostles, they pause. They know, that "whatever is not of faith is sin [Romans 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.23);" and, until they can see their way clear, and be "thoroughly persuaded in their own mind," they will not proceed, [Romans 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.5); lest they lay a stumbling-block in the way of others, and bring guilt upon their own souls, [1 Corinthians 8:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.11-13).

I may add further, that they will pray unto God to guide them. They know their privilege; they know that God has said, that, if they call upon him for direction, "they shall hear a word behind them," saying, "This is the way; walk in it;" when without such a direction "they would have turned to the right hand or to the left, [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)." They therefore in every difficulty betake themselves to prayer; and experience the truth of that promise, "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9)."

2. Principally, their security stems from the **care and fidelity of God**.

God has promised that "he will keep the feet of his saints, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9)," and that "none of their steps shall slide;" and this promise he does, and will, fulfill. He fulfills it to them in a variety of ways. He "takes them, as a mother does her little child, by their hand, and guides them in their way, [Hosea 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.3)."

And when they are weak, "he strengthens them with might in their inward man, [Ephesians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.16). [Colossians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11)."

And when they would otherwise fall, he upholds them with his own almighty arms; agreeably to that express promise which he has given them, "Do not fear; for I am with you. Do not be dismayed; for I am your God. I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10)." Thus is fulfilled that promise which is contained within a few verses of our text, "The steps of a godly man are ordered by the Lord; though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with his hand, verse 23, 24." We may wonder whence it is that the people of God in all ages have been enabled to maintain their steadfastness in such trying circumstances; but the true reason is to be found in that inviolable engagement which God has entered into, that "they shall hold on their way, and that their hands shall wax stronger and stronger! [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9)." This promise he has fulfilled to them, giving them "strength according to their day, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)," and enabling them "to do all things through his strength communicated to them, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

Hence then we may observe:

1. Why it is that so many professors of religion dishonor their high and holy calling.

It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess godliness are a disgrace to their profession; and by their falls they bring the very truth of God into disrepute. But why is it that their walk is so inconsistent? Is it from any lack of power or fidelity in God to keep them? No! It arises from this—that they have taken up a profession upon false and insufficient grounds; they have got the law in their heads, and in their mouths, but have never truly received it into their hearts! None will show more zeal for the tenets they have embraced than they, or talk more fluently respecting them; but they have never been "cast into the mold of the Gospel." Their opinions have been altered; but their hearts are unchanged; or, if changed at all, it is only in that they have adopted the mental lusts of pride and conceit, and false confidence—in the place of the carnal lusts of worldliness and impurity. It may be, they have added the former to the latter, affecting only the concealment of former evils, and not the utter extirpation of them. What then is to be expected from such people, but that they will dishonor their profession? From such roots nothing can be hoped for, but bitter fruits!

But let not the blame be cast upon the gospel. "They have a name to live, but they are dead." If ever they had received the law of God into their hearts, it would have produced its due effect upon their lives; and not upon the outward deportment only, but on every temper and disposition of their minds.

True religion is, and must be, the same in all ages; if it transformed the saint-s of other days into the image of their God in righteousness and true holiness—then it will do so still; and, if the conduct of any who profess it be unworthy of their high calling, let the blame attach where it ought, not on religion, but on those who make a hypocritical profession of it. Only let the law be in the heart, and we have no fear of the fruits that will appear in the life.

2. How inseparable is the union between **duty**and **privilege**.

The self-depending formalist who dreads the mention of privilege, and the Antinomian professor who hates the mention of duty, are equally remote from the truth of God. Depend on God we must; for it is He who must work all our works in us. And obey his law we must; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Neither can supersede the other.

To the Antinomian then I say, "Let the Word of God abide in you; and let it dwell in you richly in all wisdom."

And to the formalist I say: Look unto God to begin, and carry on, the whole work of grace in your hearts; for without Him you can do nothing.

Let both of you know, that both confidence in God, and obedience to Him, are necessary; it is only by a reliance on Him that you can obtain strength for obedience; and it is only by obedience that you can prove the sincerity of your faith and love.

But while to those who would lean to either extreme I would say, "What God has joined, let no man put asunder," I would most affectionately encourage the true Christian to expect all that God has promised. Your difficulties may be great, and your conflicts severe; but "your Redeemer is mighty;" and He who bought you with his blood, regards you as his purchased possession, and will allow "none to pluck you out of his hands." He has promised to carry on and perfect his work in your hearts; and what he has promised, he is able also to perform. Only be careful to know and do his will; and He will bear you up in his everlasting arms, and "preserve you blameless to his heavenly kingdom."

#567

DAVID'S DISTRESS AND CONSOLATION

**[Psalm 38:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-9)**

"O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you!"

It will be of great use to us through life to treasure up in our minds the dealings of God with us on some particular occasions. As his care over us in our difficulties may well call for "a stone of remembrance, which shall be called our Ebenezer," so his merciful attention to us at the first commencement of our humiliation before him, may well be written in indelible characters upon our hearts. The Prophet Jeremiah, looking back to some season of peculiar distress, records his experience in terms of lively gratitude, [Lamentations 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.1-4); [Lamentations 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.12-13); [Lamentations 3:17-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.17-21).

In like manner, David opens to us all his views and feelings when he sought the Lord after a season of darkness and distress; and he tells us that this Psalm was written by him "to bring to remembrance" the troubles he then endured, and the tender mercies of God towards him.

From the part we have just read, we shall be led to consider,

I. David's **distress**.

This was exceeding great. Let us notice,

1. The **source**and **cause**of David's distress.

He traces it to sin as its proper cause, verses 3, 4, 5; and sin is the true and only source of all trouble. Sin is an object of God's abhorrence; and wherever it exists unlamented and dominant, he will visit it according to its desert. In whoever sin is found, whether he be a king on his throne, or a beggar on a dunghill, he will make no difference, except indeed to punish it in proportion to the light that has been resisted, and the aggravations with which it has been committed. Doubtless the sins of David were of most transcendent enormity, and therefore might well be visited with peculiar severity; but we must not imagine that his are the only crimes that deserve punishment; disobedience to God, whether against the first or second table of the Law, is hateful in his sight, and will surely subject us to his "hot displeasure".

2. The extent and depth of of David's distress.

David's soul was overwhelmed with a sense of God's wrath. "God's arrows" pierced his inmost soul; and his hand was heavy upon him, and "pressed him sorely." His iniquities, which, when they were yet only committed in desire and purpose, appeared light, now were an insupportable burden to his soul; insomuch that "he roared by reason of the disquietness of his heart." Here then we see what sinners may expect in this life. Truly such experience as this is little else than a foretaste of Hell itself!

But David's body also was afflicted with a grievous disease, which had been sent by God as an additional mark of his righteous indignation verses 3, 5, 7. And no doubt, if we could certainly discover the reasons of the Divine procedure, we should often see diseases and death inflicted as the chastisement for sin! [1 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.30). David viewed his disorders in this light; and those, without any additional load, were heavy to be borne; but, when added to the overwhelming troubles of his soul, they almost sunk him to despair. Let those who think lightly of sin, view this monarch in the state above described, and say, whether sin, however "sweet in the mouth—is not as the the gall of asps within us! [Job 20:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.12-14);" yes, assuredly, it will sooner or later "bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder!"

But in the midst of all this trouble, he makes mention of,

II. David's **consolation**.

While deeply bemoaning his sin, he was assured that God was privy to all the workings of his soul, beholding his desires, and hearing all his groans. Now this was a great consolation to him, because he well knew,

1. That God, in the groanings of a penitent, recognizes the voice of his own eternal Spirit.

Groans are the natural expressions of inward pain and anguish; and when they arise from a sense of sin, groans are indications of a penitent heart. But no pious disposition is found in man until it is planted there by the Holy Spirit. God is "the Author of every good and perfect gift," and must "give us to will, no less than to do" whatever is acceptable in his sight.

As for groanings on account of sin, they are more especially said to be the fruits of the Spirit, who thus "helps our infirmities, and enables us to express those feelings which are too big for utterance, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26)." To man such inarticulate sounds would convey no distinct idea; but God understands them perfectly, because "he knows the mind of the Spirit;" and he delights in them, because it is in this way that "the Spirit makes intercession for us," and because these very intercessions are "according to the will of God, [Romans 8:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.27)."

What a consolatory thought is this to one that is overwhelmed with a sense of sin! "He knows not what to pray for as he ought;" and perhaps the load upon his spirit disables him for uttering what his unembarrassed judgment would dictate; but he recollects that God needs not anyone to interpret to him our desires; he understands a sigh, a tear, a look, with infallible certainty; he sees all the self-loathing and self-abhorrence that is contained in such expressions of the penitent's feelings; and in answer to them, he will "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think!"

2. That to such expressions of penitence, all the promises of God are made.

It is not to the fluent tongue, but to the contrite heart, that pardon and peace are promised. "To this man will I look," says God, "even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit," "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15); [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2)." "He will fulfill, not the requests only, but the desire also, of those who fear him," and "of those who hope in his mercy." If only we look unto him we shall be lightened," yes, we shall be saved with an everlasting salvation, [Psalm 102:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.17); [Psalm 102:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.19-20). [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17); [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)." The publican who dared not so much as lift up his eyes unto Heaven, but smote on his bosom, and cried," God be merciful to me a sinner!" went down to his house justified, when the self-applauding Pharisee was dismissed under the guilt of all his sins.

Now this is an unspeakable consolation to the weary and heavy-laden sinner. Had he to look for grounds of worthiness, or even for any considerable attainments, in himself, he would be discouraged; but finding that the invitations of God are made to him as wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and that the promises are suited to him in that state, he comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, and finds rest and peace unto his soul.

From this view of the Psalmist's experience we see,

1. What an evil and bitter thing sin is!

"Fools will make a mock at sin," and represent it as a light and trivial thing; but let anyone look at David in the midst of all the splendor of a court, and say, what is sin—which could so rob him of all earthly pleasure, and bring such torment upon his soul! Was that a light matter? If we will not be convinced by such a sight as this, we shall learn it by sad experience in the eternal world, where the worm that will prey upon our consciences shall never die, and the fire that shall torment our bodies shall never be quenched. O that we might be instructed, before it is too late!

2. What an enviable character is the true Christian, even when viewed under the greatest disadvantages.

We cannot conceive a Christian in circumstances less enviable than those of David in the passage before us. Yet compare him with an ungodly or impenitent man under the most favorable circumstances that can be imagined, and ask:

Whose views are most just?

Whose feelings are most rational?

Whose prospects are most happy?

With the ungodly, "God is angry every day!"

On the godly, he looks with pleasure and delight.

The joys of the godly will soon terminate in inconceivable and everlasting misery!

The sorrows of the ungodly will soon terminate in endless and unspeakable felicity! [Luke 16:19-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.19-26) and [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.10).

The sinner in the midst of all his ravelings has an inward witness of the truth of our Lord's assertion, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

3. Of what importance it is to attain just views of the character of God.

If God is viewed merely as a God of all mercy—then we would never repent us of our sins.

But if God is viewed as an inexorable Judge—then we shall be equally kept from penitence by despair.

But let God is seen as he is in Christ Jesus, a "God reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them"—then let him be acknowledged as "a just God and a Savior," and instantly will a holy fear spring up in the place of presumption, and hope dispel the baneful influence of despondency.

Know then, Beloved, that this is the very character of God as he is revealed in his Gospel. He is "just, and yet the justifier of those who believe in Jesus;" he is to the impenitent indeed "a consuming fire;" but, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!" Let the groaning penitent then look up to him with cheerful hope; yes, with assured confidence, that God will not despise even the lowest expressions of penitential sorrow; however "bruised the reed may be, the Lord Jesus will not break it; nor will he quench the smoking flax," though there is in it but one spark of grace, and a whole cloud of corruption; never did he yet "despise the day of small things;" "nor will he ever cast out the least or lowest that come unto him." Only come to him in faith, and "according to your faith it shall be done unto you!"

#568

THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE

**[Psalm 39:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.4-5)**

"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. Behold, you have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Truly every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah"

There is nothing more painful to a pious mind than to see how generally religion is neglected and despised. A godly man delights to speak of the things which are nearest to his heart; but he is often constrained to be silent, lest he should only induce the people whose welfare he would promote, to blaspheme God, and to increase thereby their own guilt and condemnation. Gladly would he benefit all around him; but in many cases he perceives that the very attempt to do so would be to "cast pearls before swine." In tenderness to them therefore, as well as from a regard to his own feelings—he imposes a restraint upon himself in their presence, and "refrains even from good words," though it is a pain and a grief to him to do so.

Such was David's situation when he penned this Psalm. He was grieved to think that rational and immortal beings, standing on the very verge of eternity, should act so irrational a part; and not finding vent for his feelings among men, he poured them out before God in the words which we have just read; and entreated God that, however careless others were about the concerns of eternity, he might be more deeply and abidingly impressed with them.

Wishing that your minds may be suitably affected with this all-important subject, I will set before you,

I. David's estimate of man's present state.

David acknowledges that he himself could form but a very inadequate notion respecting it.

Speculatively indeed he knew well enough, that man's days are but few at all events, and quite uncertain as to their continuance; but the deep, and practical, and influential sense of it he had not in any degree equal to its importance; nor could he impress it on his own soul, without the powerful assistance of God's Holy Spirit. Hence he poured forth this earnest petition to his God, "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life!"

It is thus with us also. Speculatively, the most ignorant among us has as perfect a knowledge of the subject as the most learned; but practically, no one knows it, unless he have been taught of God; and even those who have "heard and learned it from the Father," need to be taught it more deeply from day to day.

That children do not reflect upon it, we do not wonder, because of the vanity of their minds, and their almost entire lack of serious consideration. But when people are grown to maturity, we might well expect them to feel so obvious a truth. They see that multitudes are cut off at their age; and they know that with the termination of the present life, all opportunities of preparing for eternity must cease; yet they not only do not lay these considerations to heart, but they will not hear of them, or endure to have them presented to their view.

Nor are those who are more advanced in life at all more thoughtful on this subject. Engaged in worldly business, and occupied in providing for their families, they put the thoughts of eternity as far from them as they did amidst the more pleasurable pursuits of youth. And even when they attain to old age, they are as far from realizing the expectations of death and judgment as ever. They know, in a speculative way, that they are nearer to the grave than they were in early life, and that they may at no distant period expect a change. But still these views are no more influential on their minds than they were at any former period of their lives.

A condemned criminal, who has but a few days to live, feels that every hour brings him nearer to the time appointed for his execution; but not so the man who is bowed down with years; the very habit of living puts at an indefinite distance the hour of death; and days and months pass on without ever bringing at all nearer to his apprehensions the time of his dissolution.

Even the sick labor under the same mental blindness. They attend to the fluctuations of their disorder; and one single symptom of convalescence does more to remove the expectation of death from them, than many proofs of augmented debility do, to bring it home to their feelings with suitable apprehensions; they are still buoyed up with hopes from the skill of their medical attendant, when all around them see that they are sinking fast into the grave! Whatever is a man's age or state, it is God, and God alone, who can make him thoroughly to know and feel how frail he is.

Nevertheless the view here given to us is truly just.

The life of man is so short, as to be really "nothing before God." The comparison with it to "a hand-breadth" is peculiarly deserving of our attention; because by that image every man has, placed as it were before his eyes, "the measure of his days;" he cannot look upon his hand without calling to mind how frail he is, and how soon his present state of existence must come to an end. Let him divide his life into the periods of youth, manhood, and old age; and let him in his own apprehension divide his measure also; and it will bring to his imagination, in a very forcible way, the truth which he is so backward to contemplate.

A great variety of other images are used in Scripture to convey this truth:

Life is compared to a weaver's shuttle which flies quickly through the loom, [Job 7:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.6-7).

Life is compared to a ship, which soon passes away, and leaves no trace behind it.

Life is compared to an eagle, which, with the rapidity of lightning, hastens to its prey, [Job 9:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.25-26).

But the image in our text is more striking than them all; because, while it is peculiarly simple, it is also practical. Not that any image is sufficient to paint the shortness and uncertainty of life in its true colors; for "before God, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, [2 Peter 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.8)," life is absolutely "as nothing."

As far as words can describe the state of man, truly the Psalmist has done it in our text. "Man is vanity;" not only vain, but vanity itself! "Every man" is so; not only the poor and ignorant, but the rich and learned; as it is said, "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity! [Psalm 62:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.8)."

And this they are "in their best state;" even in the vigor of youth, and in the midst of all the pleasures and honors that their hearts can wish.

And they are so "altogether," both in mind and body; for their body is "crushed before the moth;" and in respect of their mind, they are, as far as spiritual things are concerned, "like the wild donkey's colt." This description may appear exaggerated; but it is true! Yes, truly things are so, whether we will believe it or not; and if any deny it, our answer is, "Let God be true; but every man a liar."

Such being the real state of man, I will endeavor to show you,

II. The vast importance of being duly impressed with the reality of the shortness and uncertainty of life.

It was the lack of this knowledge that made the adversaries of David so proud and contemptuous; and it was from a conviction of these truths that David was led so deeply to bewail their infatuation.

1. A due consideration of the **shortness**and **uncertainty**of life would be of infinite service to **diminish our anxieties about the things of time**.

We would think but little of our pleasures, or riches, or honors, if we considered how short a time they would continue, and that they may all vanish, together with life itself, the very next hour! There are examples in abundance, in every age and place—to show the extreme vanity of all that the world calls good and great. It is not in the Bible alone that we see those who promised themselves years wherein to enjoy their newly-acquired wealth—cut short and called in an instant to their great account. We see it continually before our eyes, that the messenger of death is sent to many, who think of their end as little as any of us can do; and the sentence, "You fool! This night shall your soul be required of you!" is executed without any previous notice or expectation.

If it is thought that still, if not in their own persons—yet in their heirs—they enjoy the things for which they have labored; I answer, that they are often deprived of those very heirs, on whose aggrandizement they had set their hearts; and are constrained to leave their wealth to others who are comparatively strangers to them! Moreover, supposing their destined heir to succeed to their wealth—they little know what effect it may have upon him, and whether he may not dissipate it all in a tenth part of the time that it took them to amass it! Solomon mentions this as a very great drawback upon human happiness, "I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless! [Ecclesiastes 2:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.18-19)."

It is probable that Solomon saw how weak his son Rehoboam was; and certainly, of all the instances that ever occurred of the vanity of human grandeur, this is the greatest; for Solomon's head was scarcely laid in the grave, before ten of the tribes out of the twelve revolted from his son, and, instead of being his subjects, became his rivals and enemies! [1 Kings 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.16); [1 Kings 12:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.19). And in the space of fire years afterwards, all the treasures with which Solomon had enriched both his own house and the temple of the Lord, were taken away by an invading enemy; and bronze shields were made by his son to replace the golden shields with which the temple had been adorned, [1 Kings 14:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.25-27).

How strongly does this illustrate those words of David which immediately follow my text! "Surely every man walks in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain; he heaps up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them!"

Assuredly, all our feelings, whether of hope or fear, whether of joy or sorrow, whether for ourselves or others, would be moderated, if only the thought of the transitoriness and uncertainty of human affairs were once duly impressed upon our minds.

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short! From now on:  
those who have wives should live as if they had none;  
those who mourn, as if they did not;  
those who are happy, as if they were not;  
those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them.

For this world in its present form is passing away! [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)."

The one thought of how "transient everything in this world is," would produce in us, if not an indifference to the concerns of time—yet at least a moderation in our regard for them! [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31).

2. A due consideration of the **shortness**and **uncertainty**of life would be of infinite service **to augment our diligence in preparing for eternity**.

Who that considered the uncertainty of life, would defer the concerns of his soul, which are of more importance than ten thousand worlds! It were rather to be expected that such a one would give neither sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids, until he should have secured, beyond a possibility of doubt, the favor of his God. One would think that every hour spent in any other pursuit should be grudged by him; and that, whatever efforts were made to divert his attention to any other subject, he should say with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come down! [Nehemiah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.3)."

With what care, under such impressions, would a person read the Word of God!

With what humility would he attend divine ordinances!

With what strong crying and tears would he present his supplications at the throne of grace!

How, in all that he did, would he resemble those who contended in the Olympic games—running, wrestling, fighting as for their very life! The man with the avenger of blood close at his heels would not exert himself more to reach the city of refuge, than such a one would in "fleeing from the wrath to come!" It is only those who promise themselves days and months to come, who can sleep at their post, and dream of more convenient seasons, which may never arrive, [James 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.13-14).

In this view then I cannot too earnestly entreat you to offer, each of you for yourselves, the prayer of David, "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life!" And I beseech you to get his estimate of human life so engraved on your hearts, that you may walk under the influence of it to the last hour of your lives! In a word, My heart's desire and prayer to God for every one of you is, that you may be so wise as to make the most of your time!

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom!" [Psalm 90:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.12)

#569

DAVID'S SUCCESS IN PRAYER AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO US

**[Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3)**

"I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD."

This Psalm undoubtedly refers to Christ, being expressly applied to him by an inspired Apostle; and so applied, as to have the whole weight of the Apostle's argument depending on the truth and propriety of his citation in [Hebrews 10:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4-9).

Yet it certainly refers to David also, who, in some parts of it, speaks in his own person—and in others, in the person of the Messiah. It is in this way that the prophetic writings generally speak; there will be found in them a primary or historical sense, and a secondary or mystical sense; the two senses being sometimes more blended, and sometimes more distinct.

Here, as in several other Psalms, some parts of the Psalm are more applicable to David, and others to the Messiah. To David, we conceive, the words which we have just read more immediately belong; and, as spoken by him in his own name, they will lead me to set before you:

I. David's conduct in a season of deep distress.

What the particular distress was, we are not informed. Sometimes the language which he here uses has respect to sufferings under persecution.

Thus in the 69th Psalm he says, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters, [Psalm 69:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.1-2); [Psalm 69:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.14)."

Again, in the 142nd Psalm, "Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I; bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name! [Psalm 142:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 142.6-7)."

But in the Psalm before us, he speaks more particularly as under the pressure of sin, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; my iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me verse 12." On this account I understand his distress to have arisen chiefly on account of sin, under a sense of which:

1. David "waited patiently **upon** the Lord".

He betook himself to prayer. And where should a weary and heavy-laden sinner go, but unto his God; or how should he approach his God, but in a way of humble, fervent, and continual supplication? In what manner he prayed, he tells us in another Psalm, "Out of the depths have I cried unto you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice; let your ear be attentive to the voice of my supplication! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord; my soul does wait; and in his Word do I hope! [Psalm 130:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.1-5). See also [Psalm 38:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-6)."

He was not like those who "pour out a prayer only when God's chastening is upon them;" he would call upon his God day and night; and never cease to wrestle with him, until he had prevailed, [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26). [Hosea 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.3-4).

2. David "waited patiently **for** the Lord".

He well knew how often he had turned a deaf ear to the voice of God; and therefore, how justly God might turn a deaf ear to him. Yet he hoped in the multitude of God's tender mercies. He came not pleading any merits of his own, nor trusting in any outward services whatever; he knew that God required not the sacrifice of bulls and of goats to expiate sin, but faith in that better sacrifice which should in due time be offered for the sins of men; and he came pleading the merit of that sacrifice, and trusting that through it he should ultimately find acceptance, verse 6-11. However long therefore God should withhold an answer of peace, he would wait, and patiently too, without murmuring; satisfied, if, after ever so many years of continued supplication, God should at last say to him, "Do not fear; your sins, which are many, are forgiven!"

The wisdom of this conduct may be seen in,

II. The benefit which David derived from his prayer.

God "inclined his ear to him, and heard his cry;" and, in answer to his supplications, God gave to David:

1. Liberty.

The image under which David depicts his unpardoned state is very beautiful and just. "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire." Say, you who know what it is to be shut up, as it were, under a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of God's wrath, whether any words can adequately describe the darkness, the misery, and the bondage of a soul so circumstanced?

The state of Jeremiah, when cast into a dungeon, and sunk in the mire, and ready to perish with hunger, [Jeremiah 38:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 38.6); [Jeremiah 38:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 38.9-10), was distressing to flesh and blood; but what was that to a sinner shut up in hourly expectation of the wrath of an offended God! Oh! it is inexpressibly tremendous; no tongue can tell how a soul trembles, and sinks, and faints under such appalling apprehensions, as are called by the Apostle, "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume it!" But from this state David was delivered by means of fervent and persevering prayer. Who will say that he was not well repaid for waiting, for waiting patiently upon the Lord, and for the Lord? Had his supplications been unintermitted for ten thousand years, they would have been well compensated by such an answer as this at last.

And, if a promise of such an answer after such a period were given to anyone that is now gone beyond redemption, we may well conceive with what ardor he would commence, and prosecute his labor through the appointed time; the very hope of deliverance at last, would more than half annihilate the anguish with which despair has already overwhelmed his soul.

2. Holiness.

When God, by a sense of pardoning love, "lifted David up out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire," he at the same time "set his feet upon a rock, and established his goings." What that rock was, we are at no loss to determine; it was no other than "the Rock of Ages," the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "a sure foundation" to all who stand upon him! [Isaiah 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.15), and who will impart of his own stability to all who put their trust in him. "On this Rock the whole Church is built; nor shall the gates of Hell prevail against it! [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18)." It is not pardon alone that we obtain by union with the Lord Jesus Christ; but strength also, to walk steadfastly in the ways of God. Separate from him, we can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); united to him by faith, we can do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13); and so established shall our hearts be by his grace, that we may defy all the powers of darkness, and already, by anticipation, enjoy our final triumph, [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7). [Isaiah 41:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-16). [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)."

What a fruit then was here of persevering prayer! Yet so shall all who wait patiently upon their God be favored; they shall be "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

3. Joy.

"A new song was now put into the mouth of David, even praise unto his God." And praise is indeed a "new" song to one who is but just brought to peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ! The unconverted man knows it not, as he has not a heart attuned to it. He may feel somewhat of gratitude for temporal mercies; but for the communication of spiritual blessings he cannot render any cordial thanks, because he never has received them, nor ever felt his need of them.

Jeremiah might be sensible of his obligations to Ebed-melech for deliverance from the dungeon, because he had a deep consciousness of the peril and misery from which he had been rescued; but without that consciousness all professions of gratitude for such a deliverance would have been absurd.

Just so, until we are sensible what a horrible pit we have been taken out of, we can never have our mouth filled with praises and thanksgivings to our redeeming God! But this ardent love to God and holy delight in him, invariably spring out of a manifestation of God's mercy to the soul. David would praise his God every day, and all the day long; and it would seem that the greatness and the multitude of the deliverances given to him—disposed him, beyond all other of the sons of men, to pour out his soul in acclamations and Hosannahs to his God.

What then is,

III. The **improvement** we should make of David's experience.

The apostle Paul tells us that the mercy given to him was intended by God for the instruction and encouragement of others.

For their instruction, that they might know how great the patience of God was.

And for their encouragement, that they, from so glorious an example of mercy, might learn to expect the same.

Thus David, speaking of this experience of his, says, "Many shall see it, and fear, and shall put their trust in the Lord."

From David's experience then we may learn:

1. To use the same **means** as David.

We are not to say, David found mercy form the Lord, therefore I may expect the same at all events; but therefore I may expect the same in a diligent use of the same means.

David feared; and therefore I must "fear;" I must fear the displeasure of my God; I must fear lest I be left in the horrible pit, and sink forever in the mire of unforgiven sin.

My fear also must be operative—stirring me up to earnest prayer, and stimulating me to "flee for refuge to the hope that is set before me."

The use we are apt to make of any extraordinary displays of divine mercy, and which many make of the mercy given to the penitent thief upon the cross, is to say within ourselves, God is too merciful to punish men in the eternal world; if I in a dying hour do but ask forgiveness, I also shall obtain mercy; and therefore I will not trouble myself about turning unto God, until I find, or think I find, that death is coming upon me.

But let not any of us be guilty of so perverting the mercies of our God; let us "not so despise his goodness and patience and long-suffering; but let his goodness lead us to repentance." Let us say, David found deliverance by waiting patiently. Just so, I will wait patiently also. But it was with strong crying and tears that David sought for mercy; and in that way I will seek it also.

It was in these holy exercises too that David was so constant; and in them also will I be constant, and persevere unto the end—assured, that it is only by patient continuance in well-doing I can ever hope to obtain the desired benefits.

2. To expect the same **end** as David.

We should never imagine ourselves to be in so low a state, but that God is able to deliver us from it. If, like Jonah, we were, as to our own apprehensions, "in the belly of Hell," yet from thence we should cry to him, assured that he would hear our voice, and "bring up our souls from the pit of corruption, [Jonah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.2); [Jonah 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.6)."

The state of David was as desperate as it could well be; yet from thence was he rescued, to his unutterable joy. Hezekiah also seems to have been in a similar state, and to have experienced a similar deliverance, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for you have cast all my sins behind your back! [Isaiah 38:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.17)."

Thus shall it be with all who will seek God in sincerity and truth, especially when, like David, they seek him through the sacrifice and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their feet shall then be extricated from the mire, and set upon the Rock, where "their feet shall not slide," and from whence "they shall never be moved." And though their lives hitherto may have been spent in sighing and mourning—yet shall there be given to them "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness!" In a word, let them only pray in faith; and however "wide they open their mouth—it shall be filled! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)."

#570

CHRIST A PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

**[Psalm 40:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.9-10)**

"I have preached righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly."

Some of the most important prophecies are introduced in such a way as clearly to show that their writers were overruled, as it were, by a divine impulse, to speak things which they themselves did not understand.

This was certainly the case with Caiaphas, who, being the High Priest, was moved by God to utter words, of the true import of which he had not the slightest conception, [John 11:49-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.49-52).

I think it highly probable, also, that David in this Psalm had no just comprehension of the prophecy before us. The beginning of the Psalm and the end of it seem to belong to David only; but here is a passage which can have no reference to him, and can be interpreted of Christ alone. To him it is applied in the Epistle to the Hebrews; the writer of which, showing the utter inefficacy of the legal sacrifices to take away sin, refers to this Psalm in confirmation of his statement; and argues from it, that God in this very passage had declared his determination to "remove" the shadowy institutions of the law, and to "establish" that which was revealed in the Gospel, even "that one offering of Christ Jesus, whereby the whole world may be sanctified and saved, [Hebrews 10:4-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4-10)."

The words of my text stand in immediate connection with those cited by the Apostle; and they declare what Christ should do in his prophetic office; that as, in the capacity of our great High Priest, he should offer himself a sacrifice for our sins, so, in the capacity of a Prophet to his Church, he should "preach righteousness and salvation" to the whole world.

I. This passage is fulfilled in the ministry of Christ himself.

Our blessed Lord did not, indeed, open the truths of the Gospel so fully as his Apostles did after his resurrection; for, until after his death and resurrection, the people were not prepared to receive a full communication of all which he was commissioned to reveal. He told his hearers, that "he had many things to say unto them; but that they could not bear them then, [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12)." Yet did he so far unfold the mystery of godliness to his hearers, that all future revelations of it should evidently appear to be only a continuation and enlargement of the same divine testimony.

1. Jesus traced salvation to its source—the love of God the Father, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16).

2. Jesus referred to his own sufferings as the means whereby it was to be accomplished, [Matthew 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.28); [Matthew 26:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.26-28).

3. Jesus displayed it in all its glorious effects—the glory of God, and the salvation of man, [John 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.28); [John 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32). He opened it fully, under the images of the bread of life, [John 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.35); [John 6:47-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.47-51); [John 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.13-14), as also under other images, [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26); [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6).

Nor could any consideration whatever induce him to conceal within his own bosom any one truth which he was commissioned to declare.

He could appeal to the heart-searching God, "I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, you know." In every part of his ministry "he witnessed a good confession, [1 Timothy 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.13);" and, at the close of it, gave the most explicit directions relative to the truths that should be proclaimed by all the ministers of his Word, [Luke 24:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.46-47).

II. This passage is fulfilled yet further in the ministry of all his faithful servants.

The apostle Peter unfolded this great salvation both to Jews, [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.36); [Acts 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.16); [Acts 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.19); [Acts 4:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.10-12); [Acts 5:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.30-31); [Acts 13:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.38-39). and Gentiles [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43). Paul determined to know nothing among his people, "except Jesus Christ and him crucified, [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2)."

And we also can appeal to God that we, according to our ability, have followed his steps, "not shunning to declare unto you all the counsel of God, [Acts 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.27).

Let me then inquire,

1. What do you know of gospel salvation?

It is surprising how ignorant of this great salvation many are, even after it has been preached to them faithfully for many years. But the truth is, men do not meditate on what they hear, or pray to God to impress it on their minds by his Holy Spirit; and hence, the word, like seed sown by the way-side, is taken away from their hearts, and either never springs up at all, or springs only to wither immediately for lack of either root or moisture. But, my dear brethren, you must give account to God of all that you hear, as I also must of all that I preach; and I pray God, that I may so speak, and you hear, that we may "give up our account together, with joy, and not with grief".

2. What effect has gospel salvation produced upon you?

The use of the Gospel is to bring us unto Christ, and to assimilate us to his divine image. If, then, we receive it aright, we shall be able to say with Christ, "I delight to do your will, O my God; yes, your Law is within my heart, verse 8." And, as Christ did not hide God's righteousness within his heart, but proclaimed it boldly "to the great congregation," so must you, brethren, before the whole world be ready to confess Christ, and to follow him faithfully, even unto death. You must not only "cleave to him with full purpose of heart, [Acts 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.23)," but must "glory in his cross, and by means of it be crucified unto the world, and have the world crucified unto you! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

Let me then ask, Is it thus with your souls? Oh, "let there be in you the mind that was in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)." So shall you partake with him in all the glory and felicity which the Father has conferred upon him [Philippians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9), and which he also is empowered to bestow on all his faithful followers, [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29). [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

#571

CONSOLATION TO THE DISTRESSED

**[Psalm 40:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.17)**

"I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me!"

That part of the Holy Scriptures which most fully opens the exercises of the heart, is the book of Psalms. There we see a man of God unbosoming himself before his Maker, and declaring all his hopes and fears, his griefs and consolations.

Sometimes he speaks in the person of the Messiah, and sometimes in his own person; sometimes his words are applicable both to the one and the other. These varieties often appear in the very same Psalm; some parts of which exclusively relate to the type, or to the antitype; and other parts are common to both. It is thus in the Psalm before us.

That it refers to the Messiah, there can be no doubt; because it is applied to him by God himself. Compare verse 6-8 with [Hebrews 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-7). Yet there are in it some expressions, which should rather be explained in reference to David only. The twelfth verse in particular must be understood in this way; and the circumstance of all the following verses being repeated in another place, and formed into a distinct Psalm by themselves, Psalms 70, is a strong reason for referring them also to him principally, or perhaps to him alone.

I. In the words of our text we notice **David's distress**.

David on some occasions was reduced to great straits and difficulties with respect to his temporal concerns; but he was also much tried in his spirit; and the distress before us seems to have arisen from,

1. A sense of David's **guilt**.

In verse 12, he speaks of "his iniquities having taken such hold upon him, that he was not able to look up; that they were more than the hairs of his head, so that his heart failed him." It is very probable that David alluded in some measure to those dreadful enormities which he had committed in the matter of Uriah. But he would not consider those actions merely as insulated and detached, but rather as indications of the extreme depravity of his heart. In this light he speaks of them in [Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.5); and in reference to that he might well say of himself, "I am poor and needy."

Indeed, he who knows anything of the spirituality of God's law, or of his own immediate departures from it, can use any other language than that in the text?

Was Adam poor when despoiled of the Divine image through the commission of one sin; and are not we, whose iniquities are more in number than the hairs of our head?

Was Adam needy, when banished from Paradise, and doomed to eternal death; and are not we, who from our very birth have been "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath?" Though God has forgiven us, it does not befit us to forget what we are in ourselves, but to go softly before him all our days, repenting in dust and ashes.

2. A sense of David's **weakness**.

David had other enemies than those who opposed his regal authority. He complains in another Psalm, "Iniquities prevail against me, [Psalm 65:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.3);" and he found it exceeding difficult to subdue them. On this account also he used the expressions in the text. He felt himself poor and needy in reference to everything that he accounted good. He lamented especially his lack of wisdom, and strength, and righteousness. Hence he cried, "Open my eyes;" "O give me understanding in the way of godliness!" "Hold me up!" "hold up my goings in your ways, that my footsteps do not slip!" "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord! for in your sight shall no man living be justified."

Similar to this is the experience of all the saints. All are insufficient of themselves for anything that is good; and the man who was stripped, and wounded, and left half dead, [Luke 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.30), was but a faint emblem of the man who, feeling in himself innumerable corruptions, is unable to mortify so much as one of them, except as he is aided from above, and strengthened by communications of the Spirit of grace. Paul himself lamented his state in reference to this; yes, he even surpassed the Psalmist in his humiliating confessions and mournful complaints, [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24).

II. But in the midst of all this, we view with pleasure, **David's consolation**.

He considered that God's caring thoughts were exercised upon him.

God is not an inattentive observer of any of his creatures; but "his eyes are more especially upon the righteous, [Psalm 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.18-19); [Psalm 34:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.15)." As "his eyes were upon the promised land from one end of the year even to the other, [Job 36:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.7). [Deuteronomy 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.12)"—so are they upon his own people in every place and in every age. He says, "For I know the thoughts I have for you, thoughts to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future! [Jeremiah 29:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.11)." He thinks of his people:  
with tender compassion,  
with loving care,  
with joyful delight.

How tenderly did he listen to the effusions of Ephraim's sorrow, [Jeremiah 31:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18-20) and [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8). With what concern does he sit as a refiner, to watch the vessel which he is purifying in the furnace, lest it should by any means suffer injury by the process that was intended only for its good, [Malachi 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.3). With what exultation too does he say, "To this man I will look, even unto him who is poor, and of a contrite spirit;" as though not all the angels in Heaven could engage his attention in comparison with such a sight! David was sensible, that in the midst of all his spiritual distress he was not forgotten by his God; but that he was, notwithstanding all his unworthiness, an object of God's paternal care! He knew it from both his past and present experience, [Psalm 31:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.7) with verse 5.

What comfort must such a consideration afford him!

Surely greater consolation could scarcely be conceived than that which would arise from this source.

What must it be to have unsearchable wisdom planning for his good!

What must it be to have almighty power ready to execute whatever Divine wisdom should judge expedient!

What must it be to have unbounded mercy pleading that his sins and frailties may not provoke God to withdraw his loving-kindness from him!

What must it be to have unchanging faithfulness demanding on his behalf the accomplishment of all the promises!

The consideration of these things must of necessity check every desponding fear and constrain him to exclaim, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God! [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)." And every one who can realize this one consideration, has within himself an antidote for every fear, and a balm for every wound.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who know little of David's experience.

The generality of those who are called Christians would be ready to despise anyone who should express himself like the inspired Psalmist. They would suppose that he was under the influence of a weak deluded mind. But let them not commend themselves on their imagined superiority; for they only betray their own ignorance! [Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17) with [Micah 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.12). Let them rather seek to know themselves, that, being made sensible of their destitute condition, they may be made rich in Christ Jesus! [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30).

2. Those whose feelings are like David's.

While you are complaining of your poverty—God is saying, "But you are rich! [Revelation 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.9)." The truth is, that the more we are sensible of our guilt and helplessness, the more ready God is to help and deliver us, "The hungry he fills with good things; but the rich he sends away empty." Indeed he paints the most destitute condition that can be imagined, on purpose that he may administer consolation to us under it, [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18). If any then are cast down as though there were no hope, let them plead with him as David did, [Psalm 142:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 142.1-7); and they shall soon find, by happy experience, that "God's thoughts and ways as far exceed ours, as the heavens are above the earth. See [Psalm 72:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.12-13). which may be illustrated by [Jonah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.6); [Jonah 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.15); [Jonah 2:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.1-10)."

#572

DAVID'S DESIRE AFTER GOD

**[Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2)**

"As the deer pants after the water-brooks, so my soul pants after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"

Great are the vicissitudes of the Christian life; sometimes the soul basks, if we may so speak, in the full splendor of the Sun of Righteousness; and at other times it does not feel the cheering influence of his rays. And these variations are sometimes of shorter duration, like successive days; and at other times of longer continuance, like the seasons of the year.

In David these changes were carried almost to the utmost extremes of elevation and depression, of confidence and despondency, of exultation and grief.

At the time of writing this Psalm he was driven from his throne by Absalom, and constrained to flee for his life beyond Jordan. There, exiled from the city and temple of his God, he stated, for the edification of the Church in all future ages, how ardently he longed for the renewed enjoyment of those ordinances, which were the delight and solace of his life. In these things he may be considered as a pattern for us; we shall therefore endeavor distinctly to mark,

I. The frame of David's mind towards God.

This is described in peculiarly energetic terms: "he thirsted after God; yes, he panted after him, as the deer pants after the water-brooks." We cannot conceive any image that could mark more strongly the intenseness of his desire, than that which is here used. A deer, when fleeing from its pursuers, has naturally its mouth parched through fear and terror; but when, by its own exertions in the flight, its very blood almost boils within it, the thirst is altogether insupportable, and the creature pants for some brook, where it may refresh its sinking frame, and acquire strength for further exertions. Such was David's thirst after God, the living God.

David's circumstances, it is true, were peculiar.

Jerusalem was the place where God had appointed the ordinances of his worship; and David, being driven from thence, was precluded from a possibility of presenting to the Lord his accustomed offerings. This was a great distress to his soul; for though God was accessible to him in prayer, he could not hope for that measure of acceptance which he had reason to expect in an exact observance of the Mosaic ritual; nor could he hope that such manifestations would be given to his soul, as he might have enjoyed, if he had approached God in the way prescribed by the law. Hence all his ardor might well be accounted for, since by the dispensation under which he lived, his way to God was obstructed, and the communications of God to him were intercepted.

We acknowledge that these peculiar circumstances account for the frame of David's mind at that time.

Nevertheless, David's frame is as proper for **us** as it was for David.

Though the observance of certain rites and ceremonies is no longer necessary, and God may be approached with equal ease from any spot upon the globe—yet it is no easy matter to come into his presence, and to behold the light of his countenance lifted up upon us. To bow the knees before him, and to address him in a form of words, is a service which we may render without any difficulty; but to draw near to the very throne of God, to open our mouths wide, and to have our hearts enlarged in prayer, to plead with God, to wrestle with him, to obtain answers of prayer from him, and to maintain sweet fellowship with him from day to day—this, I say, is of very difficult attainment; to do it indeed is our duty, and to enjoy it is our privilege; but there are few who can reach these heights, or, having reached them, prolong to any great extent the heavenly frame.

Hence we all have occasion to lament seasons of comparative darkness and declension; and to pant with insatiable avidity after the renewed enjoyment of an absent God.

I often say my prayers  
But do I ever pray?  
And do the wishes of my heart  
Go with the words I say?

I may as well kneel down  
And worship gods of stone,  
As offer to the living God  
A prayer of words alone!

For words without the heart  
The Lord will never hear;  
Nor will He to those lips attend  
Whose prayers are not sincere.

Lord, show me what I need,  
And teach me how to pray;  
Nor let me ask Thee for Thy grace,  
Not feeling what I say. (John Burton)

Let us then contemplate,

II. The evidences of this heavenly frame, wherever it exists.

Such a frame of mind must of necessity be attended with correspondent efforts to attain its object:

1. There will be in us, a diligent attendance on all the means of grace.

Where shall we look for God, but in his holy Word, where he reveals to us all his majesty and his glory? That Word then we shall read with care, and meditate upon it day and night, and listen to the voice of God speaking to us in it; We shall also pray over it, converting every command into a petition, and every promise into an urgent plea. The public ordinances we shall highly prize, because in them more especially we honor God, and have reason to expect more abundant manifestations of his love to our souls. At the table of the Lord too we shall be found frequent guests, not only because we are required by gratitude to remember the love of Christ in dying for us, but because the Lord Jesus still, as formerly, delights to "make himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread." If we do really pant after God, I say again, we cannot but seek after him in the way of his means of grace.

2. There will be in us, an acquiescence in everything that may bring him nearer to us.

God is pleased oftentimes to afflict his people, in order to wean them from the love of this present world, and to quicken their souls to a greater delight in him. Now "affliction is not in itself joyous, but grievous;" nevertheless, when viewed in connection with the end for which it is sent, it is welcomed even with joy and gratitude by all who are intent on the enjoyment of their God. In this view Paul "took pleasure in infirmities and distresses" of every kind, because they brought him to God, and God to him; him, in a way of fervent prayer; and God, in a way of rich and abundant communication, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10). In this view, every saint that has ever experienced tribulation in the ways of God is ready to say, that "it is good for him that he has been afflicted," and that, if only God's presence may be more abidingly manifested to his soul, he is ready to suffer the loss of all things, and to count them but dross and rubbish.

3. There will be in us, a dread of everything that may cause God to hide his face from us.

We know that there is, in every generous heart, a dread of anything that may wound the feelings of those we love; how much more then will this exist in those who love God, and are panting after the enjoyment of him!

Shall we, under such a frame of mind, go and do "the abominable thing which his soul hates?"

Shall we by any willful misconduct "grieve the Holy Spirit of promise, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption?"

No! When tempted to evil, we shall reject it with abhorrence, and say, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?"

We shall "put away every accursed thing that may trouble our camp."

We shall not only turn from open and flagrant iniquity, but shall "abstain from the very appearance of evil."

We shall search for sin in the heart, as the Jews searched for leaven in their houses, in order that we may be "a new lump, altogether unleavened."

We shall strive to have our every action, every word, and "every thought, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!"

4. There will be in us, a dissatisfaction of mind whenever we have not an actual sense of his presence.

True Christians cannot rest in a mere routine of duties; it is God Himself whom we seek, even the living God; and therefore we can never be satisfied with a dead form, nor with any number of forms, however multiplied.

We shall look back to seasons of peculiar access to God, as the happiest periods of our life; and in the absence of God shall say, "O that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my head!"

We shall deprecate the hidings of his face as the severest affliction that we can endure; and shall never feel comfort in our minds, until we have regained the light of his countenance and the joy of his salvation.

The conduct of the Church, in the Song of Solomon, is that which every one who truly loves the heavenly Bridegroom will observe; he will inquire after him with all diligence, and, having found him, will labor with augmented care to retain and perpetuate the expressions of his love, Chapter 3:1-4.

Let US learn then, from this example of David:

1. The proper object of our **ambition**.

Crowns and kingdoms should not satisfy the Christian's ambition. He should seek to enjoy "God himself, even the living God," who has life in himself, and is the one source of life to the whole creation. David, when driven from his house and family, did not pant after his lost possessions, his ruined honors, his deserted relatives; it was God alone whose presence he so ardently desired! O that every desire of our souls may thus be swallowed up in God, whose loveliness and loving-kindness exceed all the powers of language to describe, or of any created imagination to conceive!

2. The proper measure of our **zeal**.

In reference to earthly attainments, men in general contend, that it is scarcely possible to have our desires too ardent; but in reference to the knowledge and the enjoyment of God, they think even the smallest ardor is misplaced. But "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" and, if the measure of David's desire was right, then our desires should not stop short of his. When we can explore the heights and depths of the Redeemer's love, or count the unsearchable riches of his grace, then may we limit our exertions according to the scale which we may derive from them; but, if they surpass all the powers of language or of thought, then may we take the hunted deer for our pattern, and pursue God with fervency and ardor.

#573

ACCESS TO GOD IN ORDINANCES

**[Psalm 43:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 43.3-4)**

"Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God!"

It is supposed that David wrote both this and the preceding Psalm when he was driven from Jerusalem by his rebellious son, Absalom. After briefly calling on God to judge between him and his blood-thirsty enemies, he here shows, that the being separated from divine ordinances was to him the heaviest part of his affliction. True, indeed, his faithful servants, Zadok and Abiathar, had brought him the ark; but that he sent back again to its usual residence, [2 Samuel 15:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.25); for to have the symbol of God without his actual presence and favor, would afford him little consolation or benefit. To enjoy God in his ordinances, was his supreme delight. And hence he implores of God to "send forth his light and his truth," to conduct him back to them; for who but God could devise a way for his return? or what had he to depend upon in this hour of his extremity, but the promise and protection of God himself?

In the event of his being restored to God's tabernacles, he determined that he would go with more delight than ever "to the altar of his God, even to God himself, who was his exceeding joy," and there pay to God the vows which he had made; yes, and the harp which now hung upon the willows should again be tuned, to sing with more devotion than ever the praises of his God.

What he here promises, we find in another Psalm he actually performed, as soon as the desired deliverance had been given, "You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance. I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you—vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats. Selah. [Psalm 66:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.12-15)."

The words of my text consist of two parts:

1. A devout petition to God to restore him to his usual enjoyment of divine ordinances.

2. A joyful anticipation of augmented zeal in the service of his God.

And, in correspondence with these, we see what, under all circumstances, it befits us chiefly to desire:

I. We should chiefly desire a Scriptural and believing access to God.

It is not sufficient that we attend divine ordinances. Many frequent them without any benefit at all. We must be "led to them by God's light and truth," so that we may attend upon them with intelligence and faith.

Who but God can teach us how to approach him acceptably? Or what hope can we have in approaching him, except from the promises which he has given us in the Son of his love? In order to derive benefit to our souls, we must entreat God to "send forth his light and his truth, that they may lead us." It is only as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, that we can venture to draw near to God; for in himself, though a God of love to the penitent, he is to the impenitent "a consuming fire!" Nor could we presume to come to him in Christ Jesus, if he had not expressly declared that he would forgive our sins, and receive us to mercy for Jesus' sake, "This is the new and living way which God has opened to sinful man! [Hebrews 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-20);" (all access to the tree of life in any other way is barred forever, [Genesis 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.24);) and we should implore of God to reveal it to us, so that we may find acceptance with him, and be restored to that communion with him from which "we have been separated by our sins, [Isaiah 59:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.2)."

II. Secondly, we should chiefly desire a life of entire devotedness to his service.

David would offer on God's altar the sacrifices appointed by the Law. But we have a richer offering than all the cattle upon a thousand hills; yes, we ourselves are the sacrifices which God calls for; and, "as living sacrifices we must present ourselves to him," that every faculty and power we possess may be consecrated altogether to his service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

Truly, if God was to David "his exceeding joy," then much more must he be so to us. To David, the wonders of Redeeming Love were, comparatively, but little known. Even John the Baptist himself had but a faint insight into them, in comparison with us. "The height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ," which not even an Archangel can fully comprehend—are revealed to us; and in the contemplation of them we should "rejoice in Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)." Never should our harp lie still. We should be singing his praises every day, and all the day long.

Nor need our access to God be in the least restrained by the lack of public ordinances. Doubtless they are of infinite value; for "God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob;" but in every house, and in every heart, is an altar to the Lord, from whence the sacrifices of prayer and praise may ascend up before God continually, and be regarded by him as "offerings of a sweet-smelling savor."

In a word, to be devoted to God in heart and life is the great end of ordinances; which are no farther serviceable to us, or acceptable to God, than as they are productive of these effects. And, as it was for this end that David so earnestly implored of God a restoration to his ordinances, so it is this which, in attending upon ordinances, we, my brethren, must continually bear in mind, and make the great object of our pursuit.

APPLICATION.

As for those who are strangers to spiritual religion, I forbear to address this subject to them; for to them it can appear, as the Apostle tells us, no better than "foolishness, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14);" and their very ignorance of the subject is itself a sufficient condemnation to them.

But to those who have been endued with somewhat of a spiritual discernment, this subject affords abundant matter for the deepest humiliation. For, who among us values God's ordinances as David did, and accounts the loss of them the most bitter ingredient even in the bitterest cup which he has to drink? And, in attending upon them, what coldness and formality do we too often feel!

As for "our joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ," how faint is it, when compared with that which he expressed in the Psalm before us, even in the midst of his heavy and accumulated afflictions!

Dear brethren, I blush for you, and for myself also; and I would propose to you to adopt, for our future imitation, that resolved purpose of the Psalmist, "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth!

[Psalm 57:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.7-11)." Happy shall we be if we attain to such a frame; for it is an anticipation and foretaste of Heaven itself.

#574

SOURCES AND REMEDY OF DEJECTION

**[Psalm 43:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 43.5)**

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!"

It has pleased God to allow many of his most eminent servants to be in trouble, and to record their experience for our benefit, that we, when in similar circumstances may know that we are not walking in an untrodden path, and that we may see how to conduct ourselves aright.

The Psalmist was conversant with afflictions of every kind. In the preceding Psalm, which seems to have been penned during his flight from Absalom, he gives us a very melancholy picture of his state; tears were his food day and night, while his enemies gloried over him, and said continually: Where is now your God [Psalm 42:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.3); [Psalm 42:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.10)." "His soul was cast down within him;" for while "the waves and billows threatened to overwhelm him, the waterspouts threatened to burst upon him; so that deep called unto deep, [Psalm 42:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.6-7). Waterspouts are very formidable to mariners, because if they burst over a ship, they will sink it instantly; and here they are represented as conspiring with the tempestuous ocean for their destruction," to effect his ruin; and it seemed as if all the powers of Heaven and earth were combined against him.

In speaking of these things, he sometimes expostulates with God, "Why have you forgotten me? [Psalm 42:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.9)." but at other times he checks himself, and, as it were, reproves his soul for its disquietude and despondency, [Psalm 42:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.5); [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11). The Psalm before us was evidently written on the same occasion; it contains the same complaints. Compare 42:9 with 43:2; and ends, like the former, with a third time condemning his own impatience, and encouraging his soul to trust in God!

I. David's words lead us to consider the **sources** of his dejection.

It cannot be doubted but that temporal afflictions will produce a very great dejection of mind; for though sometimes grace will enable a person to triumph over them as of small consequence—yet more frequently our frail nature is left to feel its weakness; and the effect of grace is to reconcile us to the dispensations of Providence, and to make them work for our good.

Still however, though we are saints, we do not cease to be men; and it often happens, that heavy and accumulated troubles will so weaken the physical frame, as ultimately to enfeeble the mind also, and to render it susceptible of fears, to which, in its unbroken state, it was an utter stranger.

The disquietude of the Psalmist himself arose in a measure from this source; and therefore we must not wonder if heavy losses, and cruel treatment from our near friends, or troubles of any other kind—should weigh down the spirits of those who have made less attainments in the divine life.

But we shall confine our attention principally to spiritual troubles; and among these we shall find many fruitful sources of dejection:

1. Relapses into sin.

By far the greatest part of our sorrows originates here. A close and uniform walk with God is productive of peace; but declensions from him bring guilt upon the conscience, together with many other attendant evils. And if those professors of religion who complain so much of their doubts and fears, would examine faithfully the causes of their disquietude, they might trace it up to secret neglects of duty, or to some lust harbored and indulged.

2. The temptations of Satan.

Doubtless this wicked fiend is an occasion of much trouble to the people of God; else his temptations had not been characterized as "fiery darts! [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16)," which suddenly pierce and inflame the soul.

We may judge in a measure how terrible Satan's assaults are, when we see the Apostle Paul, who was unmoved by all that man could do against him, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24), crying out with such agony and distress under the buffetings of Satan! 2 Corinthians 12:7-8.

We shall have a yet more formidable idea of them, if we consider that the Lord of glory himself, when conflicting with the powers of darkness, sweat great drops of blood from every pore of his body, through the agony of his soul. Can we wonder then if the saints are sometimes dejected through the agency of that subtle enemy?

3. The hidings of God's face.

We do not think that God often hides his face from men without some immediate provocation; but we dare not to say that he never does; because he is sovereign in the disposal of his gifts; and because he withdrew the light of his countenance from Job without any flagrant transgression on the part of his servant to deserve it. It is scarcely needful to observe, how painful that must be to those who love God. Our blessed Lord, who bore the cruelties of men without a complaint, was constrained to cry out bitterly under the hidings of his heavenly Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" And certainly this is the most distressing of all events, "the spirit of a man, when strengthened from above, may sustain any infirmity. But a wounded spirit, wounded too by such a hand, who can bear? [Proverbs 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.14)."

Having traced out the sources of dejection, let us ponder that,

II. David's words lead us to consider, the **remedy** for his dejection.

The great remedy for every temporal or spiritual affliction is faith! This, and this alone, is adequate to our necessities. The efficacy of this principle for the space of three thousand six hundred years is declared in the 11th chapter to the Hebrews; toward the close of which, we are told what it enabled them to do, [Hebrews 11:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.33-34), and what to suffer, [Hebrews 11:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.36-37). It was that which the Psalmist prescribed to himself as the cure of his disquietude:

1. "Hope in God!"

We are too apt in our troubles to flee unto the creature for help, [Hosea 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.13). But it is God who sends our troubles; ("they do not spring not out of the dust, [Job 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.6),") and God alone can remove them. We should therefore look unto him, and put our trust in him. This is the direction which God himself gives us; he reminds us of his wisdom and power to over-rule our trials for good; and exhorts us, when weary and fainting, to wait on him as our all-sufficient Helper! [Isaiah 40:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.28-31).

2. Expect deliverance from God.

To what end has God given us such "exceeding great and precious promises"—if we do not rest upon them, and expect their accomplishment? The refiner does not put his vessels into the furnace, to leave them there; but to take them out again when they are fitted for his use! Just so, it is to purify us as "vessels of honor," that God subjects us to the fiery trial. We should say therefore with Job, "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold! [Job 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.10)." It was this expectation that supported David, "I would have fainted," says he, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! [Psalm 27:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.13)."

We are told that "light is sown for the righteous, [Psalm 97:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.11)." That is sufficient for us. Between seed-time and harvest there may be a long and dreary winter; but still every day brings forward the appointed time of harvest; and the gardener waits in an assured expectation of its arrival. [James 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.7).

Thus must we wait, however long the promise may seem to tarry. [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3); and as those who are now in Heaven were once in great tribulation like ourselves, [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14)—so shall we in due season be with them, freed from all remains of sin and sorrow! In our darkest hours we should hold fast this confidence, "I shall yet praise him!" Compare [Psalm 118:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.17-18) with the text.

3. View God in his covenant relation to you.

It is observable, that our Lord, in the midst of his anguish, addressed his Father, "My God! my God!" Now thus should we do. God is the God of all his redeemed people; yes, he dwells in them, [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16), and is, as it were, the very life of their souls, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4). However distressed then we may be, we should regard him as "the health of our countenance, and our God."

What a foundation of hope did the remembrance of God's paternal relation to them, afford to the Church of old, [Isaiah 63:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.15-16). And what a sweet assurance does God himself teach us also to derive from the same source, [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16). If we sincerely desire to be his, we have good reason to believe that we are his; and if we are his, then he will never allow any to pluck us out of his hand! [John 10:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.27-28). Hold fast this therefore, as an anchor of the soul; and it shall keep you steadfast amidst all the storms and tempests that can possibly assail you.

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are in a drooping desponding frame.

We cannot give you better counsel than that suggested by the example of David.

Inquire, first, into the reasons of your disquietude.

If it proceeds from temporal afflictions, recollect that these are rather tokens of God's love, than of his hatred; for "whom he loves, he chastens, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6)."

If it arises from the temptations of Satan, then do not take all the blame to yourselves; but cast a good measure of it at least on him from whom they proceed.

If you are troubled about the hidings of God's face, entreat him to return, and once more to lift up upon you the light of his countenance.

And if, as is most probable, "your own sins have hidden his face from you"—then repent and humble yourself for them, and implore his grace that you may be enabled henceforth to mortify and subdue them.

At all events, having once searched out the cause, you will know the better how to apply a remedy.

But, in the next place, it will be proper to check these desponding fears. The text is not a mere inquiry, but an expostulation; and such an expostulation as you should address to your own souls. For, what benefit can accrue from such a frame? It only weakens your hands, and discourages your heart, and dishonors your God.

We do not say that there are not just occasions for disquietude; but this we say, that instead of continuing in a dejected state, you should return instantly to God, who would "give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness! [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3)."

But, above all, "encourage yourself in God!" This is what David did in the text, and on another most memorable occasion, [1 Samuel 30:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.1-6). And while there is an all-sufficient God on whom to rely, you need not fear though earth and Hell should be combined against you! [Psalm 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1); [Psalm 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.4); [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1); [Psalm 27:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.3); [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1).

2. To those who are entire strangers to disquietude and dejection.

We are far from congratulating you on your exemption from such feelings as these. On the contrary, we would propose to you, in reference to that exemption, the very same things as we recommended to others in reference to their distresses.

First, inquire into the reason of your never having experienced such feelings. "Why are you NOT cast down, O my soul? and why are you NOT disquieted within me?" Does it not proceed from an ignorance of your own state, and from an unconcern about that account which you must soon give of yourself at the judgment-seat of Christ?

Next, expostulate with yourself, "O my soul, why are you thus callous and insensible? Will not your contempt of God's judgments end in your ruin? It must not, it shall not be; you have neglected your eternal interests long enough; you shall, God helping you, bend your attention to them from this time; for if you be summoned before your God in your present state, it had been better for me that I had never been born!"

But you also, no less than the disconsolate, must found your hopes on God. All your expectation must be from Him, "with whom there is mercy and plenteous redemption!" If you will but turn to him in earnest, you have nothing to fear; for his Word to you is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon!"

#575

THE REIGN OF CHRIST DESIRED

**[Psalm 45:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.3-5)**

"Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds. Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet."

This Psalm is called "A wedding song;" and it is supposed to have been written on occasion of Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter. But, beyond all doubt, a greater than Solomon is here. Solomon was altogether a man of peace; but the King here spoken of was "a man of war;" and all the address which is here made to him has reference to him under that character. It may seem strange that this view of him should be introduced on the occasion of a nuptial solemnity; but it must be remembered that as the Jews were accustomed, by God's special permission, to connect themselves in marriage with females whom they had taken captive in war, allowing them a month to forget their former relatives—so the Messiah first *conquers* those whom he afterwards unites himself in the nuptial bonds.

This is particularly marked in the address to the spouse herself, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own people, and your father's house; so shall the King greatly desire your beauty! verses 10, 11." Hence, even while contemplating the Lord Jesus under the idea of a husband, we see why we should be anxious to behold his conquests extended over the face of the whole earth. That we may attain the spirit which David breathed, let us consider,

I. The frame of David's mind.

In reading the Holy Scriptures, we should not be content with noticing the mere sense of any particular passage, (though that is surely in the first place, and with the greatest diligence, to be examined,) but we should mark the peculiar spirit of it, the spirit which the passage itself breathes, the spirit of the person who wrote it, or which it has a tendency to produce in those who read it.

When David penned this Psalm, his mind was full of zeal for Christ.

He had been contemplating the glory and excellency of Christ, "My heart," says he, "is stirred by a noble thing; I speak of the things which I have made concerning the King." And so full was his heart of this glorious subject, that "his tongue was as the pen of a ready writer," which yet was scarcely capable of keeping pace with the ardor of his mind, or of giving utterance to the vast conceptions with which his soul labored! He beheld the Lord Jesus Christ as possessing in himself an excellency far beyond that of any created being, "You are fairer than the children of men." He saw that, both in the subject and manner of his ministrations, there was a grace which nothing could equal, and which God would honor with the most wonderful success, "Grace is poured into your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever." And anxious to behold the full accomplishment of all that the Messiah had undertaken, he further calls upon him to take to him his great power, and to subdue the whole world unto himself, "Gird your sword upon your thigh, and let the people of every nation under Heaven fall under you!"

In all this you will perceive, that instead of speaking of Christ, as he had intended to do, he is constrained, by the ardor of his own mind, to address himself directly to Christ; and, instead of making his thoughts a subject of communication with man, he is led by them into the exercise of immediate communion with his God. Now,

Such should be the frame of our minds also.

We should be in the constant habit of meditating upon Christ; and of so musing upon his glorious excellencies, that a fire should be kindled in our bosoms! And what other subject is there under Heaven to be compared with this?

Reflect a moment, who the Savior is! He is "the mighty God!"

Consider what he has done! He has assumed our nature, and become a man, in order that, by substituting himself in our place and stead, he might deliver us out of the hands of our great enemy, and bring us into an everlasting union with himself, as "our Friend and our Beloved."

Consider how rich and free and full are all his invitations and promises; and what blessings will attend the progress of his rule, wherever men shall be subdued unto him.

Should we not long to see his glory advance, and his kingdom established in the world?

Should it not be grievous to us to behold so great a part of the world both ignorant of him, and in rebellion against him?

Should we not be urgent with him in prayer, to make bare his arm, and to subdue the world unto himself?

Surely these are the meditations that befit us; and our hearts should be so full of them, that, wherever we go, and whatever we do, Jesus should be present to our minds; and his praise should be, as it were, the constant effusion of our souls.

But in my text we are more particularly led to notice,

II. The object of David's desire.

He desires that Christ's kingdom may be established in the world. But, that I may open this to you the more fully, I wish you to mark,

1. Wherein Christ's kingdom consists.

It is "in the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness" that the Savior advances to the combat. The whole world is lying in darkness; and he comes to dispel error from their minds. The whole world is full of all manner of abominations; pride stalks through the earth, defying even God himself, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" and every species of wickedness is indulged, without either remorse or fear.

But the Lord Jesus Christ comes to humble man in the dust before God; and to transform the children of the wicked one into the very image of their God, in righteousness and true holiness! Who must not wish for such a kingdom to be established throughout the whole world? Who must not make it his very first petition from day to day, "May Your kingdom come!" Truly, wherever that kingdom is, which consists "in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"—there is Heaven itself begun in the souls of men.

2. By what means Christ's kingdom is to be erected.

The sword of the Messiah is the Word of God, which, proceeding from his mouth, [Revelation 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.16); [Revelation 19:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.15), subdues the universe before him. "That sword is living and powerful, and pierces even 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, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)." Nothing can effectually stand before it. As weak as it may appear, it is "mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ! [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5)."

Look at the primitive ages of the Church—what was it that brought down all the power and policy both of men and devils? It was not human wisdom or worldly power. It was the simple exhibition of the cross of Christ, and the preaching of Christ crucified! "This Word came to the hearts of men in demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" and, to every soul who received it, it was made "the power of God to his everlasting salvation."

3. The certainty of the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

Very sharp were the arrows which were thus sent forth from the Messiah's bow. Truly "he was a polished shaft in the quiver of Jehovah, [Isaiah 49:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.2)," and nothing could stand before it, [Isaiah 59:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.16-18).

True, indeed, God has not yet seen fit to accomplish all the purposes of his grace; but the time is quickly coming, when Satan, that great adversary of God and man, shall be bound, and "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ!" "Great things will God work," either in a way of mercy or of judgment. He has sworn, that "unto his Messiah every knee shall bow! [Isaiah 45:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23)." And every soul that bows not to the scepter of his grace shall be broken in pieces, as a potter's vessel! [Psalm 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.8-9)."

Application. Methinks you will now be disposed to ask:

1. How shall I know whether Christ's kingdom has begun within me?

Only consider wherein this kingdom consists; and you will be at no loss to ascertain the state of your souls before God.

Has the truth of the Gospel been so revealed in your hearts, as to "bring you out of darkness into marvelous light"?

Have you been so humbled by it, as to put your hand on your mouth, and your mouth in the dust, with a deep consciousness of your vileness, and of your desert of God a wrath and indignation?

And, lastly, are you so under "the constraining influence of the love of Christ, that you daily mortify sin, and live not unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you, and rose again?"

These are questions which, if put to your consciences with fidelity, and answered with truth, will show you at once whose you are, and whom you serve. Truly, by such marks we may infallibly "distinguish the children of God from the children of the devil, [1 John 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9-10);" and I entreat you to examine yourselves by them with all imaginable care; because, if you still continue to cast off the Savior's yoke, the time will quickly come when he will say, "Bring here those that were my enemies, who would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me! [Luke 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.27)."

2. How shall I get Christ's kingdom established in my soul?

You have seen the frame of David's mind. You have seen how he contemplated the Savior's love, until his soul was ravished with it, and he burst forth into the devout raptures which we have been contemplating.

Just so, this is the way in which the Savior will acquire an ascendant over our souls. The Apostle tells us, "We, beholding as in a looking-glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

I am far from saying that we ought not to search out our own evil ways, and to mourn over them before God; for it is by such repentance that the preparatory work is usually wrought within us. But I do say that nothing but the love of Christ will ever perfect that work, or bring us into the full liberty of the children of God.

It is from a view of God's "truth" that our "meekness" will be matured, and our "righteousness" be perfected; and when we are enabled to live by faith in Christ, and in dependence on his promises, then shall we be enabled to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God! [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

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BENEFITS ATTENDANT ON HOLINESS

**[Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.7)**

"You love righteousness, and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows!"

This Psalm is a nuptial song; wherein Christ, as the heavenly Bridegroom, is celebrated by his Bride, the Church; and she also is commended by him as worthy of the union proposed between them.

In the former part, the glory and excellency of Jesus are set forth in a variety of views. In the verse before the text, he is addressed as the supreme "God, whose throne is forever and ever;" while, as man, he is acknowledged to have received his glory and felicity from the Father, as the reward of his unparalleled virtues. This is undoubtedly the primary sense of the words before us.

But they may also be considered as containing a general truth, expressive of God's regard for holiness, and of those testimonies of his approbation which all godly people shall enjoy.

Let us then turn our attention to them,

I. As applicable to Christ.

That they refer to him there can be no doubt; because in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is expressly affirmed that they were addressed to him, [Hebrews 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8-9).

To Christ, the character transcendently belongs.

In his doctrine, he removed the false glosses with which the Jewish doctors had obscured the law, and established its authority over the motions of the heart as well as the actions of the life. He showed that the laws prohibiting murder and adultery were violated by an angry word or impure desire, [Matthew 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.21-22); [Matthew 25:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.27-28). He laid the axe at the very root of sin; and gave a system of morality more pure and perfect than the united wisdom of the whole world had been ever able to devise!

In his life, "he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Neither his friends who were most intimate with him, nor his enemies who were most inveterate against him—could ever find the smallest flaw or blemish in his conduct. God himself repeatedly attests that "in him was no sin.

But most of all in his death did our blessed Lord approve himself a lover of righteousness and a hater of iniquity; for he died in order to expiate the guilt of sin; yes, he came down from Heaven on purpose to atone for it by his blood; and to mark in indelible characters its malignity, by the very means which he used to deliver us from its curse!

In the whole scope of the economy which he introduced, he manifested the same righteous disposition; for at the same time that he commissioned his Apostles to go forth and evangelize all nations, he bade them to "teach their converts to observe and do whatever he had commanded." His Gospel, while it "brings salvation to men, teaches them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world;" and the ministers who are sent forth to proclaim it, are "sent to bless men, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities."

On this account God in a super-eminent degree anointed Jesus with the oil of gladness.

The Father "gave not the Spirit by measure unto him," even during the time of his ministration upon earth. See [Isaiah 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2); [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1). But though he was anointed in this world in an infinitely more abundant measure than all who were partakers of the same divine unction—yet it was rather after his death that the Spirit was given to him as "the oil of gladness." At his ascension the words before us received their full accomplishment. Then was "the joy given him, in the expectation of which he had endured the cross and despised the shame." Then was he "made full of joy by the light of his Father's countenance, compare [Psalm 16:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.10-11); [Psalm 21:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.6) with [Acts 2:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.27-28)," and was invested with a glory as much transcending that of the highest archangel, as the brightness of the sun exceeds the luster of a glimmering star. This was given him as the reward of his righteousness, "he loved righteousness," "therefore the Lord anointed him with his oil of gladness, [Philippians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.8-9)."

Though this is the primary sense of the words, we may without impropriety consider them,

II. As applicable to us. The character of the true Christian is here most fitly drawn.

There are many unbelievers whose external characters are unimpeachable; they abstain from open iniquity, and they are kind and do many charitable things.

But the distinctive mark of the true believer is that "he loves righteousness and hates iniquity."

He looks upon sin as the worst enemy of his soul. Not contented with suppressing the outward acts of sin, he strives to mortify its inward motions. The existence of sin within him is his affliction, his burden, his grief.

He abhors it!

He loathes himself on account of it!

He often cries with anguish of heart, "O what a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death!" [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24)

As for righteousness, he considers it as the health and felicity of his soul. It is the very element in which he desires to live. Were he possessed of holiness in ever so high a degree, he would not be satisfied, as long as there were any measure of it which he had not attained. He would be as "holy as God is holy," and as "perfect as God is perfect." We repeat it, that this is the distinctive character of a true believer.

Unbelievers, whatever their conduct is, have no real hatred of secret sin, no sincere delight in the secret exercises of genuine piety; but in the believer, these dispositions radically and abidingly exist!

On this account God grants the richest of blessings to the true Christian.

Who among the sons of pleasure can be compared with the Christian in respect to real happiness? The happiness of the worldly man is only as "the crackling of thorns under a pot;" it blazes for a little time, and then expires in smoke.

But let a true Christian be bereft of all that the world holds most dear, and be reduced to a condition the most calamitous in the eyes of worldly men—yet he would not exchange states with the happiest worldling upon earth; he would spurn at the proposal with contemptuous indignation!

But it is not merely over the ungodly world that a holy Christian has this advantage, "he is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows," above those who in an inferior degree participate the same heavenly calling. Occasional circumstances of temptation or of darkness may indeed for a time reduce the most eminent Christian below the standard of his weaker brother; but in the general it will be found, that the more we have of the divine image, the more we shall abound in heavenly consolation; they will have most of Heaven in their souls, who have the greatest fitness for it in their hearts and lives.

And though these holy joys are not bestowed on account of the believer's merits—yet are they strictly and properly a reward for his piety; they are a reward of grace—though not a payment of a debt. God has in numberless places assured his people, that "he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him," and that "it shall be well with the righteous, who shall eat the fruit of their doings, [Isaiah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10)."

Inferences:

1. What a mercy it is to have such an example as Christ!

If we entertain any doubt how we ought to walk, or what shall be the outcome of a godly life, we need only look to the Lord Jesus Christ; in him we see precisely "how we ought to walk and to please God," and what shall be the termination of a life spent in the service of our God. In him we shall find an answer to the cavils of the world on the one hand, and to the suggestions of Satan on the other. In those things which Christ did as a Prophet, or as the Mediator—he is not an example to us; but in all other things he is; and as surely as we tread in his steps in this world, we shall be seated with him on his throne in the world to come!

2. How vain are the expectations of those who are not lovers of righteousness, and haters of iniquity!

Holiness and happiness are inseparable! It is in vain to hope for the "oil of joy"—if we are not lovers of righteousness, and haters of iniquity. Those who conform to the world's standard of goodness may be applauded by worldlings; but God will not ratify their approval.

The precepts of the Gospel are the infallible, the only rule of duty. They were exhibited in all their perfection by our blessed Lord, whose own life was a commentary on them.

If we labor to imitate Him, and to walk in all things as he walked—then our short-comings and defects will be forgiven for His sake; but if we make any reserves in our obedience, we shall be regarded as despisers of his law, and take our portion with hypocrites and unbelievers!

"This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother!" [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10)

#577

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH AS MARRIED TO CHRIST

**[Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)**

"Hearken, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord."

The Psalm before us is a kind of nuptial hymn; the former part of which recites the excellencies and glories of the heavenly Bridegroom; and the latter celebrates the praises of the Church, which is his bride. Into this relation to Christ every believer is brought, [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5).

Now, as every change of situation brings with it correspondent duties—so that of marriage in particular requires a sacrifice of all other attachments. It binds each party to renounce whatever habits or practices may be found inconsistent with their mutual happiness. Such sacrifices are more eminently necessary for those united to Christ. To this effect, God addresses the Church in the words of our text.

We may consider,

I. The direction given to the Church.

The redeemed Church has, by adoption, by regeneration, and especially by her union with the Lord Jesus Christ, become the "daughter of Almighty God! [2 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.18)." She is here addressed by him under that affectionate appellation. Nor is it possible for a father to give more beneficial advice, or to deliver it in more persuasive terms, "Hearken, consider, give ear," etc.

The direction itself is of a very peculiar nature.

The Jews were permitted to marry the heathen virgins whom they had taken in war; but they were to allow them the space of a month to forget their own relations, [Deuteronomy 21:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.10-13). Thus the captives, weaned from former habits, might become loving companions, and obedient wives. In reference to this law, the Church is exhorted to forget her former friends. She has been taken captive by Christ, who makes her the first overtures of marriage; but his union with her is incompatible with worldly attachments. She can never love and obey him as she ought, until her heart is weaned from all other lovers.

The direction is given to every individual in Christ's church.

Every wife is to forsake her parents, and cleave to her husband, [Genesis 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.24); much more is it needful for the soul to forsake all for Christ! To him we are espoused by our own voluntary surrender, [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2); nor will he be satisfied with a divided heart, [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2). Ungodliness and worldly lusts must be renounced, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12) and [1 Peter 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.2-3); the companions of our unregenerate state must be forsaken, [2 Corinthians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-17). Our very parents, yes, even life itself, must be hated, when they stand in competition with him, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26).

The change in our actions and affections must be radical, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17); and we must subscribe from our hearts the terms proposed to us, [Hosea 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.3).

This injunction will not appear harsh, if we attend to,

II. The arguments with which the direction is enforced.

God deals with us in all things as intelligent beings, and labors to persuade us by rational considerations.

1. It is our highest interest.

Though the Church is vile in herself, she is complete in Christ! [Colossians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.10); he has given orders for her thorough purification, [Esther 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 2.3). When she is presented to him, she is cleansed from all the filthiness of her former state, [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27). Hence she is exceedingly beautiful in his eyes, [Song of Solomon 4:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 4.9-11); and he feels a longing desire after communion with her, [Song of Solomon 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.14). No bridegroom ever so much rejoiced over his bride, as he over her! [Isaiah 62:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.5).

More especially is he delighted with her when he sees that her heart is devoted to him, [Proverbs 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.20). How powerful an argument is this with a sincere soul! What can influence a wife more than to know that her conduct will conciliate the esteem of her husband? Just so, what can delight a regenerate soul so much, as to please the Lord Jesus Christ? Let this hope then animate us to renounce all for him, and to address him in the words of holy David [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25).

2. It is our indispensable duty.

The husband is to be considered as lord over his wife, [1 Peter 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.6); to him she owes a humble obediential reverence, [Ephesians 5:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.33). Christ also is the supreme Head and "LORD" of his Church. No limits whatever are to be set to his authority. We must "worship" and serve "him" equally with God the Father, [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23). Let us then at least show him that regard which we ourselves expect from a fellow-creature. A husband will not endure a rival in his wife's affections. Just so, shall we then "provoke the Lord himself to jealousy" by worldly attachments? Let us not dare in such a way to violate our nuptial engagements to Christ. When anything solicits a place in our hearts, let us utterly reject it; and let us exercise that fidelity towards him, which we have ever experienced at his hands.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are endeavoring to unite the love of the world with the love of Christ.

The interests of the world, and of Christ, are altogether opposite! Our Lord declares them to be absolutely irreconcilable, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24). James also represents even a wish to reconcile them, as an incontestable proof of enmity against God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). As Jesus deserves, so he demands, our whole hearts! [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26). Let us not then "mock him, and deceive ourselves." If the Lord is God, let us not serve Baal, but him! [1 Kings 18:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.21); and let us unite in imitating the repentant Jews, [2 Chronicles 15:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.12).

2. Those who are desirous of uniting themselves to Christ.

It is a great honor indeed which you aspire after; yet is it offered to the vilest of the human race! [Ezekiel 16:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.3-5); [Ezekiel 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.8). But you must get a change of clothing, that you may not dishonor your new station, [Zechariah 3:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 3.3-5). [Revelation 19:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.7-8). Labor then to "purge out all remains of the old leaven!" Be on your guard, lest, after having escaped the pollutions of the world, you be again entangled with them and overcome 2 Peter 2:20. "Remember Lot's wife," that you may shun her example; so shall you enjoy the sweetest fellowship with Jesus, and live in the fruition of him to all eternity!

#578

THE CHURCH'S BEAUTY AND HAPPINESS

**[Psalm 45:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.13-16)**

"The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in clothing of needle-work; the virgins, her companions that follow her shall be brought unto you; with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace!"

That in no point of view whatever, did works render men deserving of God's favors is the avowed sentiment of our Church; yet to the full attainment of salvation, it is quite necessary that every man be holy, and possess what the Scriptures call "a fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light."

The Church is here represented under the character of a Bride that is to be joined, as in the marriage union, to her Lord. For this she must be prepared; and a preparation shall be given her suited to the occasion. In the former part of this Psalm, which is penned on the occasion of her marriage, the excellencies of her Lord are set forth; in this latter part, her excellencies also. Let us consider,

I. The redeemed church's transcendent qualities.

In the words which we have read, we see:

1. The internal qualities of her **mind**.

"The King's daughter is all glorious within." She once, in her unconverted state, was corrupt even as others; but she has been "born again," and "renewed in the spirit of her mind," and made altogether "a new creature." Once, being born only after the flesh, she had nothing but what was carnal; but now, having been born of the Spirit, she possesses a truly spiritual nature, or, as Peter expresses it, "she is a partaker of the Divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" and is progressively "changed into the image of her Lord himself, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)." Hence "the mind that was in Christ Jesus is found in her! [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)." She has:  
the same views,  
the same principles,  
the same desires,  
the same delights.

There is indeed still a corrupt nature within her, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh;" but she longs to be holy, as her Lord is holy; and strives to be "perfect, as her Father who is in Heaven is perfect." When compared with what she was, she differs as light from darkness; but in comparison with what she will be, she is only as the dawn to the meridian sun; for "her path is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

2. The external habits of her **life**.

"Her clothing is of wrought gold." This refers to the outward conduct, which is often in Scripture represented as a putting off of the old man, and putting on the new, "Put off, as concerning the former conduct," says the Apostle, "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.22); [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)." To the same effect is that other expression of his, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ [Romans 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.14);" that is, let your whole deportment be such as his was; so that anyone who beholds you may be constrained to confess, that you "walk as he walked, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6)," and that, "as he was, so are you in this world, [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.17)."

Such is every true believer; nor will the heavenly Bridegroom acknowledge as his, anyone, whose spirit, and temper, and conduct—do not accord with his.

"The clothing of needle-work" may fitly represent the assemblage of all the diversified graces which adorn her. All her dispositions being duly chastised, harmoniously tempered, and opportunely exercised—she shines in every department, and in every act; and at once approves herself faithful to her obligations, and fit for the future honors that shall be conferred upon her.

Suited to these qualities is,

II. The felicity prepared for the redeemed church.

In due time "she shall be brought to the King's palace," there to be united to him in indissoluble and everlasting bonds.

While the redeemed church is here on earth, she is to be employed in making herself ready for King Jesus.

In royal nuptials, much time was spent in preparing the bride for her husband. In the purification of the virgins from among whom King Ahasuerus was to select a wife, a whole year was occupied, "six months in purifying them with oil of myrrh, and another six months with sweet fragrances of different kinds, [Esther 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 2.12-13);" after which they were presented to him.

In like manner we are told, that the Church also is dealt with, in order to prepare her for her heavenly Bridegroom; for it is said, that "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish! [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27)."

This process is going forward through the whole of this life.

Every work of Providence,  
every communication of grace,  
every afflictive dispensation,  
and every joyous occurrence,  
is intended to advance it; so that at last the soul of the believer may be altogether "worthy to stand before" the King of kings, and to be admitted to the most intimate fellowship with him forever and ever!

This work completed, the redeemed church is introduced "into the palace of her Lord".

It was customary for a number of bridesmaids to attend upon the bride, in order to welcome her to her destined home, [Matthew 25:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.1). Accordingly it is said, "The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought with her to the King's palace." Even here on earth, whenever any are united unto the Lord, many, both of saints and angels are ready to encourage them on the blissful occasion. And how much more will this be the case, when those who are espoused to him in this world shall be brought to consummate their nuptials in the realms of bliss!

We read of angels waiting upon Lazarus to bear his spirit to Abraham's bosom. Just so, at the departure of every saint, we may well conceive of multitudes of angels and of their former friends coming forth to welcome their arrival.

O! what joy will fill every soul! It is said, "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought;" and we may see in the book of Revelation the whole ceremony pass, as it were, before our eyes. "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God! [Revelation 19:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.6-9)."

Yes, blessed are they indeed, whether in the character of the spouse or her attendants; for though on earth they are different, in Heaven they are the same; the one being the collective body of the Church, of which the others are the individual members. This representation, it must be confessed, is figurative; but under the figure there is a reality; for, as the Scripture says, "These are the true Words of God! [Revelation 19:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.9)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who have never yet been espoused to Christ.

Let it not be forgotten, that this is a very common figure in Scripture to represent the surrender of the soul to God. To his Church of old, God said by the prophet Hosea, "You shall abide for me many days; (referring, like our text, to the purifications preparatory to nuptials;) you shall not play the harlot; and you shall not be for another man; so will I also be for you, [Hosea 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.3)." And again, "I will betroth you unto me forever; yes, I will betroth you unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth you unto me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord! [Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.19-20)."

In the New Testament also every believer is spoken of in this view, "I have espoused you to one Husband," says Paul, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ! [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2)." Know then, that if you have never solemnly engaged yourselves to Christ, as a virgin does to the object of her affections, and so pledged yourselves, as not for a moment to admit a rival to your heart—then you are not yet Christians indeed; you may bear the name; but you have no just title to the character. I call upon you therefore to do this without delay. And, if you desire to postpone this necessary act, I ask: Whom have you found so worthy of your affections as the Lord Jesus Christ? Who has done so much for you to deserve them? and who will ever make you so rich a return? Do not say, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved, that you do so charge us? [Song of Solomon 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.9);" for there is none to be compared with Him, either in Heaven or on earth.

"He is fairer than the children of men! [Psalm 45:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.2)."

"He is the chief among ten thousand! [Song of Solomon 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.10)"

"He is altogether lovely! [Song of Solomon 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16)."

O, rest not, until with holy confidence you can say, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem! Song of Solomon 5:16." And so set yourselves from this moment to prepare yourselves for him, that he may shortly "bring you to his banqueting-house, and his banner over you is love! [Song of Solomon 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.4)."

2. Those who are truly committed to be Christ's Spouse.

Look forward for the period when he will come and take you to himself! The precise hour of his arrival is not known; but it will not be very long, at all events. In the mean time, let your preparation for him be diligent and unintermitted. Seek to be daily more and more "glorious within," and to have your clothing of wrought gold ever ready; so that if his arrival is ever so sudden, he may not find you unprepared for his call. Be jealous over yourselves; and forgive me if I also am jealous over you, in relation to this matter. You know how "the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety" even in Paradise; and you may be sure that he will use his utmost efforts to "corrupt you from the simplicity that is in Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3)." Be on your guard therefore, lest either in principle or in practice you turn aside from him. Satan has numberless instruments whom he employs as his agents to deceive the world, "deceitful workers, who can transform themselves into the Apostles of Christ; as he himself also is frequently transformed into an angel of light! [2 Corinthians 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13-14)."

But entreat of God to keep you; beg of him to "hedge up your way with thorns, and even to build up a wall around you, that, if you should for a moment incline to follow after your former lovers, you may not be able to find your paths." If unhappily you have gone in pursuit of your former lovers, implore of God, that "you may never find them; or, having found, may never overtake them;" or, if you have overtaken them, separate yourselves instantly from them, and say, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now! [Hosea 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.6-7)."

#579

THE RIVER OF GOD

**[Psalm 46:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.4)**

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God!"

Frequently in the Holy Scriptures, God is compared to a fountain; in conformity with which idea, the blessings of salvation which flow from him may well be called "a river."

To the Israelites in the wilderness, there was given a stream which followed them in all their journeys.

To the Church at this day also, is "a river opened for the refreshment of all who travel Zion-ward."

Innumerable are the necessities of God's people in this dreary wilderness world; and the "troubles" with which they have to contend are often so great as to make it appear as if "the earth itself were removed, and the mountains were carried into the midst of the sea."

But God is with his people; and the river which attends their steps supplies their every need. "The whole city of God is gladdened by it, and especially the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High;" for the nearer anyone's access to God is, the more abundant are the communications made to him of grace and peace.

The exalted character given of this river will justify a minute inquiry respecting it. Let us notice then,

I. The **source** of this river.

Whence can this river be, but from God himself? But on this subject we are not left to form conjectures; for David says, "With God is the fountain of life! [Psalm 36:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.9)." And John says, that "there was shown to him a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb, [Revelation 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.1)." From God, as the primary cause of all good, and from the Lamb, who has "purchased the Church with his blood," and who is constituted "Head over all things to his Church," and has all fullness treasured up in him for his people's use; from our adorable Emmanuel, I say, all the blessings of salvation flow!

The Father, of his own sovereign will, planned a way for the bestowment of the blessings of salvation.

The Son, by his atoning blood, procured the blessings of salvation for us.

The Holy Spirit imparts the blessings of salvation to the redeemed people of God.

So that from our Triune God does this river altogether proceed.

In truth, it was typified by the waters that flowed from the rock in Horeb, and supplied the camp of Israel forty years, "They all drank the same spiritual drink," says the Apostle, "for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ! 1 Corinthians 10:4."

We may next notice,

II. The **channel** in which this river flows.

It is in the ordinances of the Gospel that all spiritual blessings are dispensed. For thus says the prophet, "It shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters; and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim, [Joel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 3.18) with [Isaiah 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.3) latter part."

To the house of God, those who are athirst come, that they may drink of its refreshing streams! "O God, you are my God," says holy David, "early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water; to see your power and your glory, so as I have seen you in the sanctuary! [Psalm 63:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-2)." Yes; these are "the golden pipes, by which the golden oil is communicated from the olive-trees" to every lamp in the sanctuary! [Zechariah 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.11-12).

See, in the days of old, what blessings attended the ministration of the word, accompanied as it was by an effusion of the Spirit from on high; nothing could withstand its power! So it still "sweeps away from men every refuge of lies, and overflows their hiding places, [Isaiah 28:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.17);" at the same time that it bears them up, as in the ark, and saves them from the deluge that will destroy the world!

We may profitably direct your attention yet further to,

III. The **depths** of this river.

The Prophet Ezekiel refers so particularly to this, that we must on no account omit the mention of it. He speaks of this river as proceeding "from under the threshold of the sanctuary, and from the side of the altar," where the sacrifices were offered. Being brought to it by the heavenly messenger who had been sent to instruct him, he was made to pass through its waters, which, in the first instance, rose only "to his ankles." On being brought to another place, he found the "waters up to his knees;" and, at another place, "up to his loins;" and then, a little further on, it was "out of the depth of any man! [Ezekiel 47:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 47.1-5)."

Now this gives a most just and beautiful representation of the Gospel; which, in our first approach to it, is so shallow, that a child may walk in it with perfect ease; but, as we advance in it, we find yet deeper truths; until, at last, its mysteries are unfathomable by any created intelligence, "so unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

Nothing can be more simple than the great leading truth of salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; a child who can but just "run, may read it," and "a wayfaring-man, though a fool, may understand it!"

But when we attempt to explore the love of Christ displayed in it, we find "a length and breadth and depth and height that infinitely surpass any finite comprehension!" "May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

But of its chief excellencies we must especially mark,

IV. The healthfulness of this river.

The Prophet Zechariah, especially referring to the Gospel, says, "It shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem! [Zechariah 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.8)." And in the passage before quoted from the Prophet Ezekiel, their efficacy is fully declared, "It shall come to pass, that everything that lives, which moves wherever the rivers shall come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come there; for they shall be healed, and everything shall live where the river comes, [Ezekiel 47:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 47.9)."

Here then we see, that these streams give health to the diseased, and life to the dead. Truly, there is no spiritual disease which shall not be removed by the use of them. Naaman thought that "Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, might be as serviceable as the waters of Israel, 2 Kings 5:12;" and, in like manner, many vainly hope to heal themselves by the application of carnal remedies to their souls.

But it is this river alone that can purify us from our sins; and the man that washes in it, however leprous he may have been, shall instantly experience its healing efficacy. Nor shall its virtue be confined to a single patient; none shall have cause to complain, like the man at Bethesda's pool, that one less indigent or more highly-favored than himself has been beforehand with him, and exhausted all its virtue, [John 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.7). Not a single believer shall fail of obtaining all he needs, if only he applies the remedy in faith, "The fountain is opened for sin and for impurity, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1); and its powers are yet as effectual as on the day that David washed in it, [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7), or the murderers of the Lord of glory sprinkled its waters upon their souls, [Acts 2:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41).

It will even give life to the dead. When a dead man was cast into the sepulcher of Elisha, the very instant his body touched the bones of the prophet, he revived, and stood upon his feet! [2 Kings 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.21). And shall not these waters, sprinkled on the soul, produce a like effect? Has not our blessed Lord himself affirmed, "I am the Resurrection, and the Life; he who believes in me, though he were dead—yet shall he live; and whoever lives, and believes in me, shall never die, [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26)."

Let it not be thought that the Gospel has lost one atom of its power; for though men are in a state so desperate, that, as in Ezekiel's vision, their bones are reduced to dust, and scattered over the face of the earth—yet shall they "rise up as a great army," as soon as ever the Word and Spirit of God shall be applied with power to their souls! [Ezekiel 37:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.1-10).

That, however, of which our text more particularly speaks, is,

V. The efficacy of the river to "gladden the whole city of God".

In two respects does it contribute to the happiness of every citizen of Zion, namely:  
by the defense which it affords, and  
by the refreshment which it administers.

Common rivers, if they afford protection against those who have no means of crossing them, give, in many instances, a greater facility of assault, either by means of large fleets, which transport an enemy with ease to any point he may choose to attack; or by smaller vessels, whereby he may come suddenly and unperceived, and disembark upon its very banks.

But this river admits no access by any such means. Hear the account given of it by the Prophet Isaiah, "Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its ropes broken. There the LORD will be our Mighty One. It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams. No galley with oars will ride them, no mighty ship will sail them, [Isaiah 33:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.20-21)."

We may conceive of a river which, by its shoals and cataracts, bids defiance to vessels of any kind; and such is that which encompasses our Zion, and keeps it from every assault. At the same time it supplies the needs of the besieged in rich abundance. From the moment that anyone tastes its refreshing streams, "he thirsts no more;" he has within himself, as it were, "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life! [John 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.13-14); [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38)."

Such perfect satisfaction both to soul and body will these waters give, that all who drink of them will have a foretaste of Heaven itself, "they draw water out of this fountain with inexpressible joy! [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.3);" "and they are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house; and he makes them drink of the river of his pleasures, [Psalm 36:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.8)." It is surely a strong-expression to say that this is a foretaste of Heaven; but look into Heaven, and you will find the very same river running there, and the blessed inhabitants partaking of it; for "the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne is feeding them, and leads them to living fountains of water; and God wipes away all tears from their eyes! [Revelation 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.17)."

Let me found an address on this sublime subject,

1. To those believers who are in circumstances of difficulty or danger.

It was after a deliverance from some impending calamity that this Psalm was written; and from that deliverance the Psalmist inferred those who trust in God have nothing to fear. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and are troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." To every inhabitant of Zion this sweet assurance belongs, "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early! verses 1-5." Know then your privilege, brethren; and amidst all the storms and dangers to which you are exposed, see your God as an impassable river around you; or, varying the metaphor, as "a wall of fire round about you, and the glory in the midst of you! [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5)." With such a protector, "can any weapon that is formed against you prosper?" You may bid defiance to every enemy; and say, with confidence, "If God is for me—then who can be against me?"

2. To those unbelievers who are seeking their happiness in the things of time and sense.

Infatuated people, who are "forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out cisterns for yourselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water! [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13)." When will you see your folly?

When will you allow your continued disappointments to instruct you?

If you will not believe the Word of God, methinks you might learn from your own experience. Did you, from such services—ever receive one single draught that satisfied you? Have you not, even in the moments of your highest enjoyment, found that you were "laboring for that which could not profit," and that "in the midst of laughter your heart was in heaviness?" Listen, then, to the invitation of the prophet, "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money; come buy and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price! Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness! [Isaiah 55:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-2)."

Truly, if you will come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and "receive the blessings he has purchased for you out of his fullness!"—then you shall "remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people, come to my aid when you save them, that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may share in the joy of your nation and join your inheritance in giving praise! [Psalm 106:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.4-5)."

#580

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST AN OCCASION FOR JOY

**[Psalm 47:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 47.5-7)**

"God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing praises with understanding!"

If we read the Psalms of David without any reference to Christ, we shall have a very imperfect view of their import. But if we consider them as containing many prophetic declarations, we shall find in them a rich mine of evangelical knowledge.

The psalm before us is supposed to have been written by David, when he carried up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion, [2 Samuel 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.15); and to represent, by that typical event, the ascension of Christ to Heaven: and, as that event was celebrated with all possible demonstrations of joy, so we are here exhorted to burst forth in joyful acclamations on account of the exaltation of Christ to his throne in glory!

We shall consider,

I. The event predicted—the Ascension of Christ.

Observe:

1. In what exalted terms our blessed Lord is here spoken of—

Thrice is he called "God:" the incommunicable name "Jehovah" is also assigned to him: and he is declared to be the "King" of Zion, and "the King of the whole earth." Now these are the titles given to him throughout the inspired writings. "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever! [Psalm 45:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.6) with [Hebrews 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8)." The name whereby he is to be called by all his believing people is, "Jehovah, our Righteousness [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)." The prophet Isaiah also says, "Your Maker is your Husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name; and your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called! [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5)." In the New Testament he is also designated by the same august titles, as "God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)," even "God over all blessed for eyer, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)." And it is no little satisfaction to us to see, that the doctrine so essential to our happiness, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, pervades the whole Scriptures, and bears that prominence in them which might reasonably be expected.

2. How exactly the representation here given of him in a figure, corresponds with the reality—

David had triumphed over all his enemies: and now, in order to honor God who had given him the victory, and that he might have the readier access to God on all occasions, he brought the ark, the symbol of the Divine presence, up to Mount Zion, that there in future it might have a fixed abode. But in this he shadowed forth the true ark, the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Deity," as ceasing from his labors, and ascending to his throne in glory, there to complete the victories which he had begun on earth. "On his very cross he spoiled all the principalities and powers of darkness, triumphing over them openly in it! [Colossians 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.14-15);" and in his ascension he "led them all captive, [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8)," and left his people to contend only with a vanquished enemy, [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11). He being now upon his throne, we can have access to him at all times, and may obtain from him all the support that we stand in need of.

But this leads me to notice, in reference to this event,

II. The **interest** we have in the Ascension of Christ.

If we considered it in no other view than as a recompense to Christ, we should contemplate it with joy. But it is a source of the richest possible blessings to us. Consider,

This ascended Savior is **our King**—

This ascension is a proof and evidence to us that he has triumphed over all his enemies. He unites these two together, the one as the effect and consequence of the other; "I overcame, and have set down with my Father upon his throne, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21)." But farther, it is a pledge that he will give us the victory also over all our enemies; He is constituted Head over all things to the Church for this very end and purpose, even "that he might fill all things, [Ephesians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.10)," and perfect for his believing people all which their infinitely diversified circumstances can require, [Ephesians 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.11-13). His being "King over all the earth" abundantly shows us, that he is able to protect us from every adversary, and to supply our every want, and to make us "more than conquerors" over all the enemies of our salvation.

Hence it is that the Psalmist so urgently renews his exhortation to us to **sing praise** unto him—

In another psalm he says, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King, [Psalm 149:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.2)." The enemies of Christ have rather reason to tremble: for he will surely "break them all in pieces like a potter's vessel! [Psalm 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9)." But his people have reason to rejoice, as Solomon plainly intimates; "Arise, O Lord God, into your resting place, you and the ark of your strength: let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your goodness, [2 Chronicles 6:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.41)."

In a word, "God has raised up his Son and given him glory, on purpose that our faith and hope may be in him;" [1 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.21). and therefore we shall be inexcusable if we do not make this improvement of the subject that is now brought before us.

Mark then with all due attention,

III. Our **duty** in the contemplation of the Ascension of Christ.

Five times does David in this short passage repeat his exhortation to us to sing praises to our ascended Lord.

1. We should sing praises to our ascended Lord with all possible **ardor**!

This is not a duty to be performed in a cold and formal manner; but with all the powers and faculties of our souls. David's frame of mind should be ours: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name! [Psalm 103:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1)." And again, "I will extol you, O God, my King; and I will bless your name forever and ever! Every day will I bless you; and I will praise your name forever and ever, [Psalm 145:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-2)." And again, "Praise the Lord, O my soul: while I live will I praise the Lord; I will sing praises unto my God, while I have my being! [Psalm 146:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.1-2)."

To this effect Paul exhorts us also; "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice! [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4)." "Rejoice evermore; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you! [1 Thessalonians 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.16); 1 Thessalonians. 5:18." To comply fully with the exhortation of the text, praise should be our one employment from day to day, and the very element in which we live. So far as our imperfect state will admit of it, the dispositions and habits of the heavenly hosts should be in such constant exercise with us, that earth should be the very foretaste of Heaven itself.

2. We should sing praises to our ascended Lord with all **intelligence**!

Every duty should be performed in a wise and intelligent manner. "Whether we pray or sing, it should be with the spirit and with the understanding also, [1 Corinthians 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.15)." Without fervor, our sacrifice would be lame; and without understanding, blind: and God could never be pleased with such offerings as these, [Malachi 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.8). The heart and mind must go together, to make our offering a reasonable service. In singing praises therefore to our ascended Savior, we should distinctly view him, not as a private person, but in his public capacity as our Head and Representative.

We should have respect to him also as our Advocate and Intercessor, who is "living on purpose to make intercession for us." We should moreover consider him as "our forerunner," who has "gone before, to prepare a place for us, and will shortly come again to take us to himself, that where he is we may be also."

These are the truths which the occasion suggests, and these the thoughts which should infuse the utmost possible fervor into our devotions. While therefore a fire burns in our bosoms, let us be sure that it is taken from the altar of our God, and that the sacrifice we present to him be that of an intelligent, as well as of a devout, worshiper.

In the review of this subject we cannot but see,

1. The blessedness of real piety—

I put the question to any living man: Can a person be otherwise than happy, who lives in the state inculcated in my text?

2. How little true piety there is upon earth—

Take this frame of mind as the true test of piety, and you will find as much of piety among the very beasts, as among the world at large, yes, and more too: for "the ox knows his owner, and the very donkey his master's crib; while God's professing people neither know nor consider their heavenly Benefactor!"

And how lamentably do even good men live below their privileges! Let the very best among us compare his experience with the frame that is here inculcated, and he must confess he has abundant reason to blush and be ashamed. Dear Brethren, let us awake to our duty, and never rest until we have attained such a measure of habitual and intelligent devotion, as shall be a pledge and foretaste of the felicity of Heaven!

#581

THE CHURCH'S SECURITY IN GOD

**[Psalm 48:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 48.12-14)**

"Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God for ever and ever! He will be our guide even to the end!"

Men read the Bible in order that they may know what they are to do; and this is well: but they should read the Bible also in order that they may know what they are to expect: for that blessed book is no less a record of their privileges, than of their duties. It is of privileges that our text speaks. The psalm evidently celebrates some triumph over confederate kings, verse 4; and it was probably written on the occasion of Jehoshaphat's deliverance from the confederate armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir; who, through the special providence of God, turned their arms against each other, and left Jehoshaphat nothing to do but to collect the spoil, [2 Chronicles 20:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.22-25). That, as might be expected, was a season of very exalted joy to all Judah: and the circumstances altogether correspond very exactly with the intimations given in this psalm. The security of Zion under Divine protection is that which is particularly specified in the text; and we are called to notice it for the benefit of future generations.

Let us consider,

I.  The survey proposed—

Whatever strength might be in the fortifications of Jerusalem, the writer of this psalm evidently looked beyond them to God, who alone is the security of his people. Moreover, Zion was a type of the Church of God, which is indeed "the mountain of his holiness, beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth; and in whose palaces he is well known for a refuge, verses 1–3." Let us then "walk about her, and count her towers, and mark well her bulwarks."

1. Let us mark the bulwarks of the **Jewish Church**—

This was founded on the purposes, the perfections, and the promises of God; and from them were derived her strength and her security.

In a season of great alarm and terror, the prophet being asked, "What shall we answer the messengers of the nation," who come to apprise us of the approach of the Philistine armies? His answer was, "Tell them that the Lord has founded Zion, and that the poor of his people shall trust in it, [Isaiah 14:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.32)." To this Paul adds, "The foundation of the Lord stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are his, 2 Timothy 2:19." God had determined from all eternity that he would have a Church and people in the world: and hence it was that neither Pharaoh in Egypt could prevent, nor all the nations of Canaan could obstruct, the establishment of Mount Zion; for "God's counsel must stand; and he will do all his will, [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.10)."

For the preservation of his Church, every perfection of the Deity was pledged. While his wisdom was engaged to disconcert, and his power to defeat, all her enemies, his truth and faithfulness formed a barrier that could not be broken through; so that, until by the iniquities of his people he was constrained to depart from them, he was "a wall of fire round about them, and the glory in the midst of them! [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5);" and every attribute of his was "a chamber in which they might lie down in perfect peace, [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20)."

Often it appeared as if his promise in relation to them would fail: but not a jot or tittle of his word ever did fail; for "he was not a man that he could lie, or the son of man that he could repent." And, after the people had been forty years established in the land of Canaan, Joshua appealed to them, that "not one good thing had failed of all that God had spoken concerning them, but that everything had come to pass according to his promise! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

2. Let us mark the bulwarks of the **Christian Church**—

Our Zion also has "her towers and her bulwarks," even the finished work of Christ, and the office of the Holy Spirit, and the economy of Redemption from first to last!

The Lord Jesus undertook to purchase unto himself a peculiar people, even with the inestimable price of his own blood: and never did he cease from his work, until he could say, "It is finished! [John 19:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.30)."

Everything that was necessary to expiate our guilt,

everything that was necessary to work out a righteousness for his redeemed people,

everything that was necessary to satisfy the demands of law and justice, all he completed perfectly!

And having fulfilled his covenant-engagements with the Father, it cannot be but that "he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied," even in the promised seed, who should prolong their days, while "the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands! [Isaiah 53:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-11)."

It is true that in vain would Christ have died for his elect people, if the Holy Spirit had not undertaken to apply to their souls the redemption which he has wrought out for them. But from the day of Pentecost to this very hour, he has not failed "to glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are his, and showing them unto men! [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14)."

He finds men dead indeed; but he quickens them to a new and heavenly life!

He gives them eyes to see!

He gives them ears to hear!

He gives them hearts to feel the truths which he has revealed to them!

"In all whom he has begun a work of grace, he never fails to carry it on, and to perfect it until the day of Christ! [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." And hence it is that all the powers of Hell have never been able to prevail against them!

Were a single Christian to be damned, the whole plan of Redemption:  
as devised by the Father,  
as accomplished by the Son,  
aa applied by the Spirit,  
would fail, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself would be robbed of all his recompense and all his glory!

But, whoever surveys "these towers," will assuredly know, that "Mount Zion cannot be moved, but abides forever! [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1)." Yes, "God's righteousness shall be forever, and his salvation from generation to generation! [Isaiah 51:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.8)."

3. Of the **Anglican Church** of which we are members—

As against the world, the Church of England has no other security than what is common to every true Church of Christ: but as against her professed members, who would despoil her of her glory and her excellency, and would sap her very foundations by the introduction of false doctrines into her community. We have towers, and bulwarks, in which we glory, and which we desire you all attentively to survey. "Come, and let us walk round our Zion, and mark well her defences!"

See there her Articles; how plain, how strong, how scriptural! There is no truth that is not there established: and though she has many false sons who would surrender them up to the enemy, there is not one which they have ever been able to impair, nor one in which her faithful people do not feel complete security.

Next, behold her Homilies, formed by men of God who knew what assaults would be made against her. There are not lacking men who complain that these are antiquated, and need repair. But they are as firm and immovable as at the first hour they were constructed: and they defy all the assaults, whether of traitorous friends, or open foes.

Then view her Liturgy. Next to the Bible, it stands the wonder of the world. Never was there such a composition for the use of those who would worship God in spirit and in truth: and, while piety shall continue to characterize the Children of Zion, this will be their joy, their glory, their defense. They may be derided, as too holy, and too precise: but, while they can point to her expressions both of prayer and praise, they will feel that they are vindicated against the whole world, and are in a bulwark that is absolutely impregnable.

The end of this survey is, "that we may tell it to the generation following:" which shows, that, both for their sakes and our own, we should contemplate:

II. The **consolation** arising from it—

What was written so many centuries ago, belongs no less to us than it did to those for whose instruction it was originally composed. It calls our attention to the God of Zion, and reminds us of,

1. Our saving interest in him—

"This God is our God forever and ever!" He is the same in himself; and bears the same relation to us; and feels the same concern for us as he did for his Church of old.

"He changes not!" "he is the same yesterday, today, and forever." "With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." And is he not our Father, our Friend, our Redeemer, our God? When did he cease to sustain these relations to his Church and people? Or when did he cease to be mindful of the offices which these relations imply? If it is said, He has ceased to work miracles—we grant it; but has he therefore withdrawn himself from the Church and from the world, so as to shut up his loving-kindness from us, and to be gracious to us no more?

Were we indeed to believe the infidel and ungodly world, we should say with them, that "God has forsaken the earth," but we know the contrary: we know, that if God's presence and agency be less visible than formerly, they are not a whit less real; and that he feels for his people at this hour, as much as ever he did at any period of the world. "He knows their sorrows! [Exodus 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.7)," and "in all their afflictions he is afflicted! [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9);" nor can an enemy touch so much as one of them, without touching "the apple of his eye! [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)."

Take this then into your consideration, in connection with the foregoing survey. The same God as watched so tenderly over his people of old, is your God! He watches over you, with the same care as he did over them. His purposes have as much respect to you as to them: his perfections are all engaged as much for you, as for them: his promises are made no less to you, than to them. For you the work of Christ, the office of the Spirit, and the whole economy of Redemption, have secured blessings, as well as for them. And the same Spirit who was poured forth in such abundant measure upon our Reformers, and endued them with such consummate wisdom and grace, is ready to "work upon your hearts," and to "fulfill in you also all the good pleasure of God's goodness, and the work of faith with power; so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ! [2 Thessalonians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.11-12)." I say then: Know from the records of the Church of old what a God you have to go to, and that "this God is your God forever and ever!"

2. Our expectations from him—

"He will be our guide even unto death!" See how remarkably he guided Jehoshaphat on the occasion which we suppose to be more particularly referred to: he told Jehoshaphat where his enemies were, at what precise spot he should find them, and when he should go against them. Twice was it repeated, "Tomorrow go out against them, [2 Chronicles 20:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.16)." So he knows exactly where our enemies are, and what they design against us, and how they are to be met: and though he will not vanquish them without our fighting—yet, if we go forth against them in dependence on him, "he will be with us," and will subdue them before us. Suppose our most formidable are enemies now in array against us; and see in what way he will interpose in our behalf: "Like as a lion," says he, "and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord almighty come down to fight for Mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord almighty defend Jerusalem: defending also, he will deliver it: and passing over, he will preserve it, [Isaiah 31:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.4-5)."

Here are no less than three figures, rising in a climax one above the other, to illustrate the zeal and efficacy with which he will interpose for us.

The first is that of a lion, who, when devouring his prey, will not be intimidated by the noise of shepherds, how numerous soever they may be, (this marks the determination with which Jehovah will prosecute our caused.)

The next is that of a parent bird, who, when she sees a bird of prey hovering over her young, and ready to dart upon them, will fly with the utmost rapidity to intercept the devourer's assault, even at the peril of her own life, (this shows the tender interest which Jehovah will take in our welfare, and the efforts he will make in our behalf.)

The last is that of the attendant Angel (the Angel of the Covenant), who accompanied the destroying angel through the whole land of Egypt, and stepped forward, wherever he saw a blood-besprinkled door, to prevent him from executing his commission there; and so effectually constrained him to "pass over" the houses of the Israelites, that, while in every house in Egypt the first-born of man and beast was slain, not one of either was slain in any house belonging to the children of Israel, (this shows the efficacy with which Jehovah will espouse our cause.)

Now then what have we to fear with such a Protector? Let men or devils combine against us, we need not give ourselves one moment's concern. Under all such circumstances, the Psalmist's language should be ours: "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble: therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God; the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High: God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early! [Psalm 46:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-5)."

In a word, we may "cast all our care on Him who cares for us! [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7);" assured, that, "if we only make God our refuge and habitation, no evil shall befall us! [Psalm 91:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-10)."

APPLICATION—

1. Search then into your privileges, that you may have the true enjoyment of them—

Think of people in a besieged city: with what delight would they view the towers and bulwarks which they had reason to believe no enemy could destroy! And will not you, who have the Lord himself for your defense?

Consider the representation which he gives of himself, as a broad river, so broad that it cannot be passed but in boats; yet so tempestuous, that no small vessel can live upon it; and so full of rocks and shoals, that no large vessel can navigate it, [Isaiah 33:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.20-22); which consequently, being impassable, secures to you, under all circumstances, the most perfect tranquility!

Consider this, I say, and tell me, whether you ought not to be ever rejoicing in your God? I would that all of you should be fully acquainted with your privileges; and that you should be frequently "walking about Zion, and counting her towers, and marking well her bulwarks, and considering attentively her palaces" in which you are lodged and feasted from day to day; so that you may be happy in your own souls, and "God may dwell in you, while you thus dwell in him!" For, if you thus "know in Whom you have believed, and that He is able to keep that which you have committed to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)," then you cannot but be happy: since he has expressly said, "I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on me, because he trusts in me! [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3)."

2. Search into them, that you may make them known to the rising generation—

We should not be contented to be happy alone, but should desire as far as possible to diffuse happiness all around us. To the rising generation in particular, we are bound to transmit the benefits which we have received. The knowledge of salvation is a sacred deposit committed to us for that very end, [Psalm 78:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.5-7); It is scarcely to be conceived how much more profitable to young people the preached Gospel would be, if they were well instructed at home. We teach our children what shall conduce to the advancement of their worldly interests; and shall we neglect the welfare of their souls? In particular, let us endeavor to impress their minds with:  
the knowledge of God, and his perfections;  
the knowledge of Christ, and his offices;  
the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, and his operations;  
so that they also may have God for their God, and their guide, and their portion, forever and ever!

#582

THE DEGRADED STATE OF MAN

**[Psalm 49:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.12)**

"Man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish!"

Man, when first he came out of the hands of his Creator, was perfect; and fit to be God's viceregent, if I may so speak, in this lower world. God put all the rest of the creation under him, and gave him dominion over all the work of his hands.

But from the time that man fell, he became degraded in all his faculties, and in many respects like unto the beasts that perish. True, possessing reason, he still held a superiority over them in those things which belong exclusively to the province of reason; but, in everything which depends on grace, he was reduced to a level with them.

To man converted by the grace of God, this superiority is restored; but to man in his natural and unregenerate state, even though he is exalted to the highest pinnacle of honor among his fellows, this humiliating declaration is fully applicable, "Man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish!"

I. Man is like the beast that perish, in his **understanding**.

In things pertaining to the body, man is far inferior to the brute creation, being excelled by one or other of them in every faculty and power. In agility and strength he is not to be compared with myriads of beasts, both tame and savage; and in all the senses he falls exceedingly below them! His sight, his smell, his taste, his hearing, his feeling—are in no respect equal to that which exists among the different orders of beasts and birds and insects; so that, in all that is corporeal, they are superior to him.

In what is intellectual, surely man retains his superiority; though, after all, in ten thousand instances, instincts in them leaves man far behind, and enables them to discern and execute things without number which man with all his attainments can never reach!

But it is in things relating to the soul that I am to speak of man; and in these he will be really found as stupid and brutish as the very beasts!

The beasts discern, for the most part, what is conducive to their welfare, and distinguish it from that which would prove injurious. But, waving this, I will admit that the beasts do not discern the comparative value and excellency of the things around them.

And what, I would ask, are the views which men have:  
of sin and holiness,  
of Heaven and earth,  
of time and eternity?

I ask not what their speculative notions may be, but what their practical views are?

Who, in his unregenerate state, regards all earthly things as comparatively vain, empty, worthless?

Who looks upon sin as hateful and abominable?

Who desires holiness as the perfection of his nature, and as a source of the sublimest bliss?

Who accounts everything as dross in comparison with the favor of God, and the enjoyment of the divine presence?

Theoretically, it is true, men know better than the beasts; but practically man is not a whit more than the beasts! Yes, men sink below the beasts in proportion as they act directly contrary to the plainest dictates of their judgment. Unconverted men, notwithstanding they acknowledge a supreme Being, act as much without a reference to his approbation as the very beasts!

Hence David describes and addresses them in these humiliating, but most appropriate terms, "They say, 'The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed!' Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? [Psalm 94:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7-9)."

Nay, more, the pious Agur, cast down on account of the remains of these infirmities within him, exclaimed, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man! [Proverbs 30:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.2)."

I think then, that the assertion in my text is thus far made good; and that not only are the lowest of the people in the state described by him, but the highest and most exalted upon earth! In this respect there is no difference between men; for all, without exception, are practically, and by nature, just as the beasts that perish!

II. Man is like the beast that perish, in his **habits**.

See what are the habits of the brute creation! All are intent on that only which will gratify their sensual appetites; and all look to present gratifications without any regard to the future.

Just so, what is the state of man, of every man, by nature, whether he be old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned? Is not every one living for himself, and seeking the things of time and sense—rather than those enduring riches which are apprehended only by faith, and relate altogether to eternity?

I grant that some are prosecuting chiefly intellectual pursuits; but still it is for themselves, and not for God, that they do it! If I admit that they soar with the eagle, instead of wallowing in the mire as swine, I still recur to my text, and say that, while living for themselves, and not for God, they are only as the beasts that perish!

A man who is taught of God desires higher things than these. He soars far beyond the sun and all created systems, however many or remote they may be; and rises to understand God himself.

Contemplating all of God's glorious perfections,  
searching into all His eternal purposes,  
admiring all the wonders of redeeming love,  
and anticipating the fruition of God himself  
—this is the constant habit of his mind, and the most eager pursuit of his life, from day to day. "Eye has never seen, nor has ear heard, nor has heart conceived," the things which fill his soul! None can appreciate the engagements of his soul, until they themselves are born from above, and taught by the Holy Spirit; for "he searches the deep things of God," which none but those who are taught, of God can know, or conceive, or estimate! [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10).

But to such habits, I say again: the unenlightened man is as great a stranger as the beasts! "He is of the earth earthy," even as the beasts themselves are. And this I say of the wise and learned. What, then, are the generality of men? Jude says of them, that, instead of seeking heavenly things, "they speak evil of the things which they know not; but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves! Jude verse 10." He knows but little of the world, who does not know, that "this witness is true."

III. Man is like the beast that perish, in his **end**.

This perhaps is the point more immediately referred to in my text. "Men's inward thought," David observes, "is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish! For, when he dies he will take nothing with him, his wealth will not descend with him, verses 11, 12, 17."

To the same effect Solomon also speaks, "I also thought: As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both. As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return! [Ecclesiastes 3:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 3.18-20)."

But we must not confine our attention to the mere circumstance of the mortality of each. The Psalmist had in his mind the thoughtlessness of men respecting anything beyond this life; agreeably to what he says in another Psalm, "A brutish man does not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be forever destroyed!

[Psalm 92:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 92.6-7)." Here is their folly, their stupidity, their brutishness:  
An eternal world is revealed to them, and they will not consider it!  
Heaven and Hell are opened to their view, and they will do nothing to avoid the one or obtain the other!

Could they indeed die like the beasts, without any future state of retribution, they would count this a desirable state. And such is the state of mankind at large, that there are very few, comparatively, who would not welcome annihilation as a priceless blessing. But to the bar of judgment every man will be summoned before long; and "all must receive, at the hands of their Judge, according to what they have done in the body, whether it is good or evil."

If in other things then, men are reduced to a level with the beasts—but in regard to eternal realities, men fall far below the beasts; inasmuch as, with an intellect capable of appreciating eternity, they act as if they had no more interest in it than the beasts themselves!

APPLICATION

1. See what a difference there is between a well-informed Christian and all others!

I will take the one from the lowest, and the other from the highest, walks in life; and say that the well-informed Christian, however poor, resembles God; while the worldling, however elevated, is like the beasts that perish!

In his understanding, the regenerate man sees things as they really are, and knows that the things which are visible and temporal are not worthy of a thought in comparison with those which are unseen and eternal!

In his habits, too, he seeks not the things which are on earth, but those which are in Heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

In his end, he goes to a world of blessedness and glory, where he shall abide forever in the bosom of his God.

His unenlightened neighbor accounts all this as folly; but the time is coming, and very shortly too, when it will be made to appear which of the two was really wise!

2. See the immense importance of the Gospel!

It is the Gospel alone that changes the hearts of men. God's appointed means of salvation is the Gospel, with which, in all ages, he has "turned men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

My dear brethren, I do hope that some at least of you can bear testimony to the truth of what I say.

Once you were as blind as others; but now you see.

Once you had no more concern about your souls than others; and lived, like others, for this world alone. But now, through the grace of God, you are brought to tread in the steps of Christ and his holy Apostles, and to value nothing in comparison with the favor of your God.

And what is it that has made this difference between your present and your former selves? It is the Spirit of Christ who has quickened you, and the love of Christ that yet daily constrains you! By this change you are assimilated to the glorified saints and angels—yes, and to the image of God himself. Bear testimony, then, to the truth and efficacy of the Gospel; and commend that to others which you have found so effectual for your own souls!

#583

THE FOLLY OF WORLDLY MEN

**[Psalm 49:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.13)**

"This is the folly of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings."

It is generally supposed that wisdom pertains chiefly, if not exclusively, to those who are proficient in education. But learning and wisdom are by no means necessarily connected with each other; they may exist separately, each in a high degree; and, in fact, there is nothing more common than to behold unsaved people of the most extensive erudition acting the part of fools in God's sight, while saved people destitute of human learning are "walking wisely before him in a perfect way."

Wisdom, properly viewed, is a conformity of the mind and will to the mind and will of God; and it exists precisely in proportion as this conformity exists.

Hence we see why David, at the commencement of this Psalm, calls in so solemn a manner, people of every age and quality to attend to his instructions; and professes to teach them lessons of the profoundest wisdom, when there is not anything recondite, or anything uncommon, in the whole Psalm. The truths contained in this divine ode are level with every capacity, and therefore might seem to be improperly ushered in with so pompous an introduction; but they are at the root of all practical religion; and they draw a broad line of distinction between those who are wise, and those who are unwise, in the estimation of their God.

The whole subject of the Psalm will come properly before us, while we consider,

I. The way of worldly men.

It may naturally be expected, that "those who are of the world, should speak of the world," and seek it as their most desired portion; and they are described as doing so in the Psalm before us.

They are altogether engrossed with earthly things.

Worldly distinction is the one object of their ambition. For this end chiefly both wealth and honor are pursued, verse 18. Having attained these things in a considerable degree, they bless themselves, as possessing something wherein they may trust, verse 6—something that will make them happy for a long time to come, and something that shall transmit their names to posterity as worthy of admiration, verse 11.

But this way is their folly!

Wealth and honor are far from affording the satisfaction that is expected from them; they will not ward off sickness and death, either from ourselves or others, verse 7-10; nor can they follow us into the eternal world, verse 17. The moment we die, as very speedily we all must, verses 12, 14, nothing of wealth and honor remains to us but the fearful responsibility attached to the possession of them. Instead of "profiting us in the day of wrath," they will rather augment our final condemnation, if they have not been improved for God as talents committed to us.

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus we behold the bitter consequences of living only to the flesh; the man who has his good things in this life, will lack in the eternal world a drop of water to cool his tongue! "He will never see light," but be consigned over to the everlasting regions of darkness and despair! verse 19. We do not wonder therefore, that the man, who, because he had gotten much, thought of nothing but his temporal enjoyments, "Soul, take your ease," is by God himself derided as a fool, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you!"

Yet, such is the influence of example, that, notwithstanding the folly of such conduct is visible to all, the same is pursued by every succeeding generation!

No one who considers for a moment the outcome of such conduct to those who have gone before them, can doubt the folly of it; for, whatever rank or station men have held in this life, or whatever may be said of them now that they are gone—what remains to them of their wealth or honor, or what enjoyment have they of their posthumous fame? If we extol them ever so highly, they feel no satisfaction; and if we condemn them ever so harshly, they are unconscious of either shame or pain. They are interested in nothing but in the quality of their actions as approved or condemned by their Judge.

This we all know; yet no sooner have we a prospect of wealth and honor ourselves, than:  
our desires are as ardent,  
our expectations are as optimistic,  
and our hopes are as unqualified,  
as that of any rich fool who has gone before us!

The conviction of their folly only floats in our imagination, but never descends as a principle into our hearts. We see and blame their folly; yet approve in practice what in theory we condemn!

As contrasted with this, let us consider,

II. The way which true wisdom prescribes.

In verse 15, the Psalmist gives us that precise view of the subject which he had before characterized as replete with wisdom, "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for he shall receive me." That is, while worldly men have no prospects beyond the grave, I look forward to a blessed eternity, which shall be the portion of all who truly love and serve God. Hence we see what way true wisdom prescribes; it teaches us,

1. True wisdom teaches us to regard this present world in its connection with eternity.

View this present world as the whole state of man's existence, and they speak well who say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

But this poor world is a mere passage to a better and eternal world. This world is an inn, at which we sojourn for a night, on our way to a better country. A person tarrying only for a few hours is not greatly elated, if his accommodations are good; nor greatly depressed, if they are bad. He considers, in either case:  
that this poor world is not his home;  
that his comfort or discomfort here is very transient;  
and that it will be time enough to look for unmixed enjoyments, when he shall have reached his Father's house.

Moreover, this world must be considered as a state of preparation for a better world: everything that is done here being an occasion of increased happiness or augmented misery to all eternity. In this view of the world, every pain and every pleasure acquires a new aspect. The things that are so highly prized by ungodly men lose their value; and everything is esteemed good or bad, according as it quickens or retards us in our Christian course.

Hence true wisdom says, "Do not love the world, [John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.15-16)," "neither be of it, [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16);" but "be crucified to it, and let it be as one crucified to you [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

2. True wisdom teaches us to follow the footsteps of the saints of old.

There are those who have gone before us, whose ways were not folly, though they might be esteemed foolish by those who were themselves blinded by Satan.

"Abraham went out from his kindred and his country, not knowing where he went, [Hebrews 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8)."

Moses refused all the wealth and honor that Egypt could afford, that he might participate in the lot of God's persecuted and despised people, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26).

Many New Testament saints "took joyfully the confiscation of their goods, knowing that they had in Heaven a better and an enduring substance! [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34)."

Matthew left his lucrative employment to follow Christ, [Matthew 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.9).

Paul suffered the loss of all things for Christ, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8); and after having engaged in the Christian course, attended to nothing but his progress in it, straining every nerve to win and secure the eternal prize! [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14).

All of these would be thought by the ungodly to carry religion to a very blameworthy excess. But they acted with consummate wisdom, each in the part he took; they all "chose the good part, which could not be taken away from them."

Let anyone who reflects on the present state of these eminent saints, say whether "their way was folly?" If it was not; if, on the contrary, it accorded with the dictates of true wisdom—then let all not only "approve their sayings," but imitate their doings also, and "be followers of them, as they were of Christ!"

Advice.

1. Guard against the influence of bad example.

There is nothing urged with greater confidence to deter young people from a religious course, or to draw them back again to the world, than example. They are told from time to time what such and such people do; and can this be wrong? But whoever they are who are proposed to us for examples, we have only to ask: Did they regulate their conduct according to the revealed will of God? Was it the one labor of their lives to walk as Christ walked?

If this was not the case, it signifies not who they were, or what they did, "their way was their folly;" and instead of taking them as examples to follow, we should rather regard them as monuments to warn us against impending ruin!

If the number and respectability of unbelievers are urged, let us remember that to "walk according to the course of this world, is to walk according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." "Christ died to deliver us from this present evil world!" We must therefore leave the broad road that leads to destruction, and walk in "the narrow way that leads unto life!" It is true that if we focus on advancing our own temporal interests, that ungodly men will speak good of us, verse 18;" but it is of little consequence what ungodly men speak or think; nothing will be of any lasting benefit to us, but the approbation of our God! [1 Corinthians 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3-4).

2. Cleave to Christ who alone is able to redeem our souls.

If man cannot redeem his brother from temporal death, much less can he redeem the soul from spiritual and eternal death; the price required for that is more than all the creatures in earth or Heaven are able to pay! verses 7-9. But Christ has paid the mighty ransom with his own "precious blood!" He has redeemed us from sin and Satan, from death and Hell!

Seek him, and you are richer than ten thousand worlds could make you.

In him you have "enduring riches and righteousness."

Go to him, and he will give you "gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich."

Your desires after Christ cannot be too ardent!

Your expectations from Christ cannot be too enlarged!

Your dependence on Christ cannot be too entire and confident!

On that side you need not fear excess. And if the world derides your way as folly, do not regard it—as they will soon alter their opinions! The moment they enter into the eternal world, they will infallibly know who were wise and who were fools! And when they meet you at the last judgment, they will say, "We fools once counted you as mad!" Their reproaches then will be turned upon themselves, and their one subject of lamentation will be, that they "approved the sayings" of a blind ungodly world, instead of the infallible sayings of God! This is the way to "walk not as fools, but as wise;" and, so walking, you shall surely before long have the plaudit of your Judge, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

#584

SPIRITUAL OBEDIENCE PREFERRED BEFORE SACRIFICE

**[Psalm 50:7-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.7-15)**

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

In the Psalm before us we have one of those sublime addresses which Jehovah occasionally makes to the whole creation, to hear and judge between him and his offending people, [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.2-3). [Micah 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.2). The images are taken from his appearance on Mount Sinai, which was with solemn majesty, insomuch that "Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake! [Exodus 19:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.16-18) with [Hebrews 12:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-21)."

The scene is "Mount Zion, the perfection of beauty," even that Zion from whence the Gospel has proceeded, and from whence Jehovah speaks to us as our Covenant-God; and this circumstance adds ten-fold weight to his accusations against us. The people whom he arraigns before his tribunal are of two descriptions:

1. Those who rested in mere ceremonial observances for the obtaining of God's favor—formalists.

2. Those who, pretending to higher principles, dishonored by their conduct their high and holy profession—hypocrites.

It is the formalists whom God reproves in our text; and the testimony which he bears against them sets forth in very striking terms:

I. The worthlessness of mere formal religion.

Men are apt to imagine that by their observance of external religious duties, they lay God under obligation to them.

God had appointed many rites and ceremonies; and he required the observance of them on the pain of death, [Numbers 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.30); but he enjoined them for the people's good, and not for any benefit that could accrue to himself. What pleasure could he take in the blood of bulls and goats? Or, if he did, what need had he to be indebted to his people for such offerings, when the whole world was his, and all the cattle on a thousand hills were at his command! It was absurd therefore, and impious, in his people to think that they conferred any obligation upon God by their offerings and oblations.

But the very same error prevails among us at this day. If we comply with the external commands of God in an observance of the Sabbath, an attendance on ordinances, and a performance of certain duties in the family and the closet—we think that we have a just claim on God, and that he must of necessity feel as much delight in us, as we do in ourselves. We adduce these services as a clear evidence of the goodness of our hearts, and as an indisputable title to the divine favor.

But external religious services are of no value in the sight of God, any farther than they are accompanied by vital piety.

On many occasions God declared his contempt for outward observances, in comparison with spiritual obedience, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams." By the Prophet Isaiah, God replies to those who boasted of "the multitude of their sacrifices;" and tells them, that the whole course of their services, unaccompanied as they were by real piety, were an utter abomination in his sight! [Isaiah 1:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-15). Even while bringing his people through the wilderness, he had explicitly declared to them, by Balaam, that it was "not by offering thousands of rams, or rivers of oil, or by giving their first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul, that they were to please him—but by doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with their God. [Micah 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.6-8)." In like manner we are told by our blessed Lord, that it is "to no purpose that we pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, if we neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth, [Matthew 23:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.23);" and that to draw near to God with our lips, while our heart is far from him, is nothing but vile hypocrisy! [Matthew 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8).

Indeed a moment's consideration may convince us, that outward religious services, of whatever kind, cannot be of any value in the sight of God, except as expressions or vehicles of inward piety; for they may be performed without any good principle in the soul. Yes, they may proceed from extremely vile and corrupt principles, such as pride, and ostentation, and self-righteousness; and they may most abound, not only where all manner of iniquity is harbored, but as a cloak and cover to that iniquity! [Matthew 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.14). In a word, "a form of godliness, where the power of it is denied," is the consummation of all ungodliness! [2 Timothy 3:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.1-5).

This is an offensive truth indeed, but it is indispensably necessary to be received.

How offensive a truth this is, may be seen, by the way in which the hearers of the first martyr, Stephen, resented it, even before it was actually declared, and when they discovered it only as the ultimate scope of his argument. Stephen had given a summary view of God's dealings with his people from the very beginning; and the scope of his argument was that as God had a people before the Mosaic dispensation commenced, so he would after its termination; as had been intimated by the Prophet Isaiah, who represents God, as pouring contempt even upon the temple itself, in comparison with a broken and contrite heart!

This passage having been cited by Stephen, the whole audience were filled with indignation, which was visibly manifested in all their countenances, and which gave occasion to that exceedingly abrupt change in Stephen's address to them, "You stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you! Compare [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1-2) with [Acts 7:47-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.47-51)."

Similar offence is given at this day, when we declare the worthlessness of all external religious duties as detached from the feelings of the heart! But the very circumstance of God calling Heaven and earth to hear his testimony against his people, sufficiently shows that his accusations, against whoever brought, involve in them the deepest criminality, and subject the accused to the heaviest condemnation.

Contrasted with mere ritual observances, we behold in our text:

II. The religion which alone is pleasing and acceptable to God.

True religion consists not so much in actions, as in the habit of the mind towards God. Holy actions of every kind spring from it; but they are only as the fruit, which originates in, and bears testimony to, the vital energy of the root. Wherever true religion exists in the soul, it will have respect to God in all things, and will induce in us a habit towards him:

1. Of genuine gratitude.

He is our Creator, our Benefactor, our Redeemer; and the very first motions of true religion will lead us to view him under these relations, and with feelings suited to the obligations he has conferred upon us.

Can we reflect on the faculties with which he has endowed us, so far superior to all the brute creation, and not adore and magnify his name?

Can we contemplate the innumerable blessings with which we are loaded by him from day to day, and not feel how greatly we are indebted to him?

Above all, can we survey the wonders of redeeming love, and not have our whole souls penetrated with an overwhelming sense of gratitude? So infinitely does this love surpass all human comprehension or conception, that if our minds were filled with it as they ought to be, we should scarcely be able to think or speak of anything else!

Such, we are sure, is the religion of Heaven; for there "they rest not day nor night" in ascribing all possible praises to their redeeming God, [Revelation 4:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 4.8-11); [Revelation 5:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-13); and such, according to the measure of grace given to us, will be the dispositions and habits of all who are truly alive to God, "We shall offer him the sacrifice of praise continually, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15)," and "render to him the calves of our lips, [Hosea 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.2)."

2. Of willing service.

All true Christians are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." As the holy angels are "doing God's will, hearkening to the voice of his Word," so we shall be studying to know his will, and be standing ready to execute it to the utmost of our power.

It is astonishing what an alteration which saving grace makes in the soul in a person! The natural man lives only to himself. The spiritual man lives, or at least endeavors to live, wholly to the Lord—to have no will, no way, no desire, no thought, but what will be pleasing and acceptable in God's sight. That which was the first expression of piety in Paul, is the first of every converted soul, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" A view of God as our Master and our Father will ensure this, [Malachi 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.6); and in proportion as religion increases in the soul, will be our endeavor to "glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)."

3. Of humble dependence.

True religion leads us to realize in our minds the thought of God's superintending care and effectual agency in our behalf. It does not bring us only to a sense of our obligations to him—but, if we may so speak, to a sense of his obligations to us. For, if "we are his people, he also is our God;" and he, by virtue of his covenant and oath, is as much bound to employ all his glorious perfections for us, as we are to improve all our faculties and powers for him.

What a blessed thought is this! In what an exalted view does it place true religion, which, if it calls us to duties, invests us also with the most glorious privileges! It teaches us to "call upon him in every time of trouble," persuaded that "he will hear us," and give us ever increasing occasion to "glorify his name." This realizing sense of his presence, this assurance of his effectual interposition in every time of need, is the crown and summit of the gospel; it most of all glorifies God, and ensures beyond a doubt the richest testimonies of his approbation!

Let us **learn** then from hence,

1. How to rightly estimate our own character.

It is not by negative virtues, no, nor by positive virtues of an external kind, that we are to judge of ourselves, but by the disposition of our minds towards God. We may be able to say with the Pharisee, "I am no extortioner, not unjust, no adulterer;" and may be able to add with him, "I fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all that I possess"—and yet be odious in the sight of God! If we would not deceive ourselves, we must inquire into the sense we have of our obligations to him, the determination we feel to approve ourselves faithful to him in the whole extent of our duty, and the confidence with which we are enabled to cast our care on him for body and for soul, for time and for eternity. Without this, whatever else we may possess, we are only "as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals;" and "if a man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. We must therefore prove our own selves, so that we may have rejoicing in ourselves and not another, [Galatians 6:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3-4)."

2. How to secure a favorable testimony from God.

Man may easily be deceived; but God will assuredly judge according to truth. He "weighs," not the actions only, but "the hearts" of men. And when he shall come at the last day, as he certainly will, in majesty and glory infinitely more solemn than that displayed at Sinai, he will testify of us before the assembled universe; and it will be a small matter that he has not to lay to our charge a neglect of outward services—if he has to accuse us of a lack of those holy dispositions which we should have entertained and exercised towards him.

We entreat you then, brethren, to look well to the state and habit of your minds; see to it, that you "delight yourselves in God;" that your whole life be a life of faith in him, of love towards him, and of zeal for the glory of his name; and, while you are presenting to him your own bodies and souls as a living sacrifice, present to him that great Sacrifice which was once offered on Mount Calvary for the sins of men, and which alone can avail for your final acceptance with him.

As much as he despises the blood of bulls and goats, he will not despise the blood of his only dear Son; but will, for the sake of it, pardon all your sins, and accept, yes and reward too, with everlasting happiness and glory, all your imperfect services!

#585

TRUE PENITENCE DESCRIBED

**[Psalm 51:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.1-3)**

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me!"

Sin is, for the most part, thought to be a light and trivial evil, especially among the higher ranks of society; as though the restraints of religion were designed only for the poor; and the rich had a dispensation granted them to live according to their own will. But sin, by whoever committed, will, sooner or later, be as the gall of asps within us; nor can all the charms of royalty silence the convictions of a guilty conscience.

View the Psalmist—he had been elevated from the low condition of a shepherd's boy, to a throne; yet, when he had offended God in the matter of Uriah, there was not found in his whole dominions a more miserable wretch than he! Before his repentance became deep and genuine, "his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long; for day and night God's hand was heavy upon him; and his moisture was turned into the drought of summer, [Psalm 32:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.3-4); [Psalm 38:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.2-8)." Even in his penitence, we may see how heavy a load was laid upon his mind. This Psalm was written on that occasion; and the words before us, while they declare the workings of his mind, will serve to show us, in a general view:

I. The true penitent in his approaches to the throne of grace.

"Mercy" is the one object of his desire and pursuit. Observe,

1. The true penitent's **petitions**.

"Have mercy upon me, O God; blot out my transgressions! Wash me throughly from my iniquities; and so cleanse me from my sin"—that no stain of it may remain upon my soul! Here he views his sins both individually and collectively; and, spreading them before the Lord with conscious guilt—he implores the forgiveness of them; dreading lest so much as one should be retained in the book of God's remembrance, as a ground of procedure against him in the last day.

Thus will every true penitent come to God; and plunge, as it were, into the fountain of the Redeemer's blood, "the fountain opened for sin and for impurity".

2. The true penitent's **pleas**.

Though David had, until the time of his grievous fall, served God with a more than ordinary degree of zeal and piety, he makes no mention of any past merits, nor does he found his hope on any future purposes. He relies only on the free and sovereign grace of God, as displayed towards sinners in the gift of his only dear Son; and to that he looks, as the ground and measure of the blessings he implores.

This is the view which every true penitent must have. He should see that God is of his own nature inclined to mercy, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7); and that all which Christ has done for us is the fruit of the Father's love, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16). [Ephesians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.4-5). [Titus 3:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.4-5). Such are the pleas which God approves; and such will surely prevail in the court of Heaven.

II. The true penitent in the daily habit of his mind.

Repentance is not a mere occasional expression of the mind, but a state or habit that is fixed and abiding in the soul.

1. The true penitent carries with him a sense of **guilt**.

"His sin is ever before him;" indeed, he wishes it to be so; he desires to be humbled under a sense of it; and though he longs to have his transgressions blotted out of God's book, he would never have them effaced from his memory; or cease, if he could help it, to have as deep an impression of their odiousness and malignity, as if they had been but recently committed. To his last hour he would "walk softly" before God, in the remembrance of them.

2. The true penitent carries with him a sense of **shame**.

He is ashamed when he reflects on his conduct throughout the whole of his life. Yes, "he blushes and is confounded before God, [Ezra 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.6)," and even loathes and abhors himself in dust and ashes, [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)." Nor does a sense of God's pardoning love produce any difference; except, indeed, as enhancing the loathsomeness of his character in his own eyes! [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31); [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63)." The name which, in sincerity of heart, he acknowledges as most appropriate to him, is that which the Apostle Paul assumed, "The chief of sinners!"

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are not conscious of having committed any flagrant transgression.

Many, doubtless, are of this character. But have they, on that account, any reason to boast?

Who is it that has kept them from heinous sins?

Who is it that has made them to differ from heinous sinners?

Will they deny that the seeds of all evil are in their hearts?

Will they deny that if they had been subjected to the same temptations as others, that they might have grievously sinned as they?

Are they better than David previous to his fall?

Let them, then, confess their obligations to God; and remember, that if in outward act they have less reason for humiliation than others, they have the same depravity in their hearts, and are in reality as destitute of vital piety as others; and, consequently, have the same need of humiliation and contrition as they.

2. Those who are deeply sensible of their guilt before God.

What a consolation must it be to you, to see that there was mercy even for such a transgressor as David. Greater enormity than his can scarcely be conceived; yet not even his prayers were poured forth in vain. Two things, then, I would say to you:

The first is: Do not attempt to mitigate your own guilt, as though you would thereby bring yourselves more within the reach of God's mercy.

The other is: Do not presume to limit God's mercy, as though it could not extend to such a sinner as you.

You never need to be afraid of beholding your wickedness in all its extent, if only you will bear in mind that God's mercy in Christ Jesus is fully commensurate with your utmost necessities or desires. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin;" and the more you feel your need of it, the more shall you experience its unbounded efficacy! Only humble yourselves as David did; and, like him, you shall experience all the riches of redeeming grace.

3. Those who have obtained saving mercy from the Lord.

Happy, beyond expression, are you! as David says, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered." Be joyful, then, in God your Savior. But still remember, that you have need at all times to watch and pray. If David, after all his high attainments, fell—then who is secure? "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." And learn from him to guard against the very first approaches of evil. It was by a look that his corruptions were inflamed; and from the progress of evil in his heart, you may learn to make a covenant with your eyes, yes, and with your hearts too. You see in him "how great a matter a little fire kindles." Walk humbly, then, before God; and cry to him day and night, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps do not slip!" "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117).

#586

SIN AN OFFENCE AGAINST GOD

**[Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4)**

"Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight; that you might be justified when you speak, and be clear when you judge!"

The occasion of this Psalm is well known; it refers to one of the most melancholy transactions that ever took place in the world. In point of enormity, the deed is almost without a parallel; because it was performed by a man who until that time had made the highest professions of religion, and had been characterized even by God himself as "the man after God's own heart."

But it is not the crime which David committed, but only the repentance which followed it which is the subject of our present consideration. For a long time his heart was hardened; but after that Nathan had come from God to accuse and condemn him, he yielded to the conviction, and humbled himself before God in dust and ashes. In this Psalm is recorded the prayer which David offered unto God on that occasion; and it was given by David to the Church, that it might be a pattern, and an encouragement, to penitents in all future ages.

The particular declaration in our text is introduced as an aggravation of his guilt. We are not however to interpret it so strictly, as if the crime which David had committed were really no offence against man; for in that view it was as heinous as can possibly be conceived; it was a sin against Bathsheba, whom he had defiled; against Uriah, whom he had murdered; against Joab, whom he had made an instrument to effect the murder; against all the soldiers, who were murdered at the same time; against the friends and relatives of all who were slain; against his own army, who were hereby weakened and discouraged; against the whole nation, whose interests were hereby endangered; against the Church of God, who were hereby scandalized; and against the ungodly world, who were hereby hardened in their iniquities. It was "a sin also against his whole body, [1 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.18)."

We must therefore understand the expression rather as comparative; as if it had been said, "Against you, you chiefly, have I sinned." Nevertheless, as an offence against God, the enormity of the crime is so great, as almost to swallow up and annihilate every other consideration of it, as the meridian sun reduces to non-existence, as it were, the twinkling of a star. It is from this consideration of it that every sin derives its chief enormity. Dropping therefore any further reference to David's crime, we shall endeavor to show in general,

I. The malignity of sin as primarily an offence against God.

Men in general think little of sin, except as it affects the welfare of society. But sin as an offence against God, it is scarcely ever deemed worthy of notice! But every sin, of whatever kind, necessarily strikes at God himself.

1. Every sin implies an atheistic forgetfulness of God's **presence**.

God is omnipresent; nor is anything hidden from his all-seeing eye. But when we commit sin, we lose all recollection that God's eye is upon us; we say in our hearts, "The Lord shall not see; neither shall the God of Jacob regard it! [Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7);" "How shall God know? Is there knowledge with the Most High? [Psalm 73:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.11)." "Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he cannot see, [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14)." This is no deduction of ours, but the declaration of God himself; and the truth of it is evident; for, if even the presence of a fellow-creature is sufficient to deter men, so that they cannot perpetrate crimes to which they are most strongly tempted; so much more would the presence of Almighty God restrain us, if we were conscious that he was inspecting and witnessing all the secrets of our hearts.

2. Every sin is a contempt of God's **authority**.

God, as the great Lawgiver, requires obedience to his laws, every one of which bears the impress of divine authority upon it. But in violating his commands, we trample on his authority, and say in effect, "I am at my own disposal; who is Lord over me? [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)." "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord; neither will I obey his voice! [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2);" "I will not have this man to reign over me, [Luke 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.14)."

We have a striking exemplification of this in the conduct of the Jews, who, contrary to God's command, would go down into Egypt, "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, (said they to Jeremiah,) we will not hearken unto you; but we will certainly do whatever thing goes forth out of our own mouth! [Jeremiah 44:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16-17)." Thus, as God himself says, "We not only forget him, but cast him behind our back! [Ezekiel 23:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 23.35)."

3. Every sin implies the disbelief of God's **truth**.

God has spoken frequently respecting his determination to punish sin; he has said, that "he will by no means clear the guilty;" and that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not pass unpunished." Now, if we truly believed his Word, we could not rush into sin; the apprehension of such tremendous consequences would deter us from it. But we are hardened by unbelief. Unbelief was the source of all the Israelites' rebellions in the wilderness, [Psalm 106:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.24). [Hebrews 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.19); and it is the fruitful spring of all our disobedience, "You shall not surely die," is at the root of every evil we commit, [Genesis 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.4). But "God is not a man, that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent; has he said, and shall he not do it? Has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)." Let us bear this in mind, that in the commission of sin, and the expectation of impunity, we "make God himself a liar. [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10)."

4. Every sin is a denial of God's **justice**.

God has represented himself as "a God of judgment, by whom actions are weighed, [1 Samuel 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.3);" and has declared his purpose to "call every work into judgment," and to "judge every man according to his works."

But, in violating his laws, "we say, in fact, God will not require it! [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13);" "The Lord is altogether such a one as ourselves! [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.21);" "The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad! [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)."

What an indignity is this to offer to the Governor of the Universe, the Judge of the living and the dead! He has spoken of the last day as "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" but, if the outcome of it were such as we expect, and Heaven were awarded to willful and impenitent transgressors, it would rather be a day wherein God's lack of justice and of holiness shall be displayed before the whole assembled universe.

5. Sin is a defiance of God's **power**.

Men who commit iniquity are represented as "stretching out their hands against God, and strengthening themselves against the Almighty; yes, as running upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his buckler, [Job 15:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.25-26);" and to what a fearful extent this is done, we may see by the testimony of God himself, "Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it. [Isaiah 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.18-19)." Does this appear an exaggerated account of men's impiety? See then how they are described by the Psalmist, "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; your judgments are far above, out of his sight; as for all his enemies, he puffs at them! [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-5)."

What an astonishing height of impiety is this; to puff at God's threatenings, as if we defied him to his face! Yet do we see that this is the very conduct of men, whenever we warn them to flee from the wrath to come; we seem to threat them with judgments which they have no cause to fear, and to set in array against them an enemy whom they are at liberty to despise.

When once we view sin as an offence against God, we shall be prepared to acknowledge,

II. The equity of his judgments which God has denounced against sin.

That God has denounced the heaviest judgments against sin, is certain.

Against sin in general he has denounced eternal misery, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God, [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17). [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18)." Against every individual that commits it, he has also denounced his judgments, "The soul that sins, it shall die! [Ezekiel 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.20). [1 Peter 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.17)." Against every particular sin, whatever be men's excuses for retaining it, the same awful sentence is proclaimed, [Mark 9:42-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.42-48). Death, everlasting death, is the wages due to sin! [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23), and the wages that shall be paid to every sinner at the last day, [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.46).

In executing these judgments, God will be completely justified.

We are ready to account such denunciations of wrath severe, and to question the equity of them. But the penal evil of damnation will not appear in the least to exceed the moral evil of sin, if we duly consider against whom sin is committed.

Consider God's greatness. "Great is the Lord," says the Psalmist, "yes, his greatness is unsearchable." If we could conceive the lowest reptile, or the smallest insect, endued with such a measure of intelligence as to be able in some degree to appreciate the dignity of a mighty monarch; and then to exalt itself against him, and to pour all manner of contempt upon him—the atrocity of such presumption would justly excite our keenest indignation.

But the whole universe together is not as the smallest insect in comparison with God; and yet we—we atom insects of an atom world, dare to set ourselves against his divine majesty, yes, to defy him to his face! Will God then be unjust if he executes his judgments on such impious worms? Are we at liberty to insult him—and is he not at liberty to avenge himself on us?

But consider also God's goodness towards us rebellious worms of the dust!

O how unbounded has this been!

How has he borne with us in all our rebellion!

How has he sent his only-begotten Son, to expiate our sin, and to open a way for our reconciliation with him!

How has he sought to glorify in our salvation, those very perfections which we have so impiously despised, and which he might well glorify in our everlasting condemnation!

How has he sent his Holy Spirit, to instruct, renew, and comfort us!

How has he sent his Word and ministers, to invite, entreat, expostulate; yes, and, as it were, to "compel us" to accept of mercy!

This he has done from our youth up; this he is doing yet daily and hourly; and, as if all his own happiness were bound up in ours, he says, "How shall I give you up?" "Will you not be made clean? Oh! when shall it once be?" This is the God against whom we are sinning. This is the God whom we wish extinct! [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1). Omitting the words in Italics; and respecting whom we say, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." This is he, "whose blessed Son we trample under foot, and to whose eternal Spirit we despise! [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29)." Yes, that very "goodness and patience and forbearance which should lead us to repentance," are made by us an occasion of multiplying our offences against him!

Say now whether he will "be unrighteous in taking vengeance?" Were a fellow-creature to make such returns to us, and to render nothing but evil to us for all the good we did to him—then would we account ourselves unjust, if we did not acknowledge him as one of our dearest friends, and place him on a footing with our own beloved children, and make him an heir of all that we possessed? Should we not feel ourselves amply justified in rejecting such an absurd and groundless claim as this?

Know then, that we have no claim on God; and, when he shall exclude us from the inheritance of his saints, "he will be justified" in the judgment that he shall denounce against us. Indeed, in assigning us this portion, he will only give effect to our own wishes, and answer us in the desire of our own hearts! We said to him, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of you! [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14);" and he will say to us, "Depart from me; depart accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41)."

The whole creation will unite in vindicating these judgments as just and good.

Doubtless, if it were possible, sinners would urge at the bar of judgment the objections which here they presume to bring against the justice of their God. But sin will then appear in all its deformity! It will then be seen what a God we sinned against, and what mercies we despised. Even in this world, when once people are brought to view themselves aright, they justify God in all that he sees fit to inflict upon them.

It is worthy of observation, that God's goodness to David is mentioned as the greatest aggravation of his offence, [2 Samuel 12:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.7-9).

Aaron, in [Leviticus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.3).

Eli, in [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18).

Hezekiah, in [Isaiah 39:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 39.8).

David, in Psalm, in 39:9.

These all confessed, that God had a right to deal with them in the way that he had done. Much more in the day of judgment, when everything will be seen in its true light, will the whole universe approve the sentence which God shall pass on the world of the ungodly; they will make the very punishment of the wicked a subject of their songs, "saying, Hallelujah! salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments! [Revelation 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 15.3); [Revelation 19:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.1-2)."

Indeed the miserable objects themselves, though they cannot join in the song, will be unable to condemn the sentence. The man who was excluded from the marriage-feast for not having on a wedding garment, might have urged, that he was brought in before he had time to procure one; but his plea would have been false and unavailing; and therefore "he was speechless! [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12)." This is a striking monument of conscious guilt, and a solemn specimen of a condemned soul, [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19).

1. In this acknowledgment then of David, we may see the grand constituents of repentance.

Many may be sorry that they have subjected themselves to punishment, just as a criminal may be sorry that he has forfeited his life to the laws of his country; but no man can truly repent, until he sees that his whole life has been one continued state of rebellion against God; and that "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" is his just desert. Until a man has this scriptural view of himself:  
he will never be thoroughly broken and contrite;  
he will never loath and abhor himself for his iniquities;  
he will never have that "repentance which is unto life, that repentance which is not to be repented of."

We entreat you all then to judge of your repentance by these marks. Do not be satisfied with being humbled on account of sin; but inquire particularly, whether you are more humbled from a view of it as against man, or a view of it as against God. These ought to bear no proportion in your estimate of your own character. Your own nothingness and vileness can only be estimated aright when viewed in contrast with God's majesty which you have offended, and God's mercy which you have despised; and until you see that everlasting misery in Hell is your deserved portion, you can never lie so low as you ought to lie!

2. In this acknowledgment then of David, we may see the true preparative for pardon.

We must bring something with us to the Savior; but what is that which we ought to bring? Must we get a certain portion of good works with which to purchase his salvation? No! this is a price which he will utterly despise. That which we are to bring is precisely what a patient brings to a physician, a sense of his extreme need of the physician's aid.

Christ came to save sinners. We then must feel ourselves sinners.

He came to seek and save those who are lost. We then must feel ourselves lost. A just sense of our guilt and misery is all that he requires. If we come wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked—then he will give us that gold that has been tried in the fire, the clothing that shall cover our nakedness, and the eye-salve that shall restore our eyes to sight.

If we come to him full—then we shall be sent empty away. But if we come hungry and empty—then we shall "be filled out of his inexhaustible fullness," we shall "be filled with all the fullness of our God."

3. In this acknowledgment then of David, we may see the best preservative from sin.

When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he answered her, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God! [Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9)." Thus we would recommend all, when tempted to commit iniquity, to consider, first, what God will think of it; and next, what they themselves will think of it in the last day? Now sin may appear light and trivial, especially if it is not such a heinous sin as adultery or murder; but when it comes to be seen in its true light, as against an infinitely good and gracious God; and when the judgments which he has denounced against it come to be felt—what shall we think of it then? Oh! ask yourselves, 'What will be my view of this matter in the last day?' Then even the sins that now seem of no account, will appear most heinous; and the price paid for a momentary indulgence, will appear most profligate.

Esau's selling of his birthright for a bowl of stew is but a very faint emblem of the folly of those, who for their sinful lusts, are induced to barter the salvation of their souls! View things now, as you will view them at the last day; and you will rather die a thousand deaths than sin against your God.

#587

ORIGINAL SIN

**[Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.5)**

"Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me!"

One of the most essential marks of real penitence is a disposition to see our sins as God sees them; not mitigating their guilt by vain and frivolous excuses, but marking every circumstance that tends to aggravate their enormity.

During their impenitence, our first parents cast the blame of their transgression upon others; the man cast the blame on his wife; and the woman cast the blame on the serpent that had beguiled her. But when true repentance was given them, they no doubt beheld their conduct in a very different view, and took to themselves all the shame which it so justly merited!

The sin of David in the matter of Uriah was great, beyond all the powers of language to express. Yet there were points of view in which none but a real penitent would notice it, and in which its enormity was aggravated a hundred-fold.

This is the light in which the Royal Penitent speaks of it, in the Psalm before us. Having spoken of it as an offence, not merely against man, but primarily, and almost solely, against Jehovah himself—he proceeds to notice it, not as an insulated act or course of action, but as the proper fruit of his inherent, his natural, corruption. We are not to suppose, that he intended by this to cast any reflection on his mother, of whom he elsewhere speaks in most respectful terms; nor are we to imagine, that he adduces the nature which he had derived from her, as an excuse for the wickedness he had committed. His intention is to humble himself before God and man as a creature altogether corrupt, and to represent his wickedness as no other than a sample of that iniquity or which his heart was full, an evil stream issuing from the overflowing fountain of his corrupt heart. This, we doubt not, is the genuine import of the words which we have now proposed to consider, "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin has my mother conceived me."

In prosecuting this important subject, we shall endeavor to establish,

I. The truth asserted.

The doctrine of Original Sin is here distinctly affirmed. It is indeed by many denied under the idea that it would be inconsistent with the goodness and mercy of God, to send immortal beings into the world in any other state than one of perfect purity. But it is in vain for us to teach God what he ought to do; the question for us to consider is, What has God done? and what account has he himself given us of our state? And here, if the Scriptures are true, there is no room for doubt: We are all the corrupt off-spring of degenerate parents; from whom we derive a polluted nature, which alone, since their fall, they could possibly transmit.

1. We see the original sinfulness of every person, from concurring Scriptural testimonies.

Moses, in his account of the first man that was born into the world, expressly notices, that Adam begat him not in the likeness of God, in which he himself had been originally created, but "in his own likeness," as a fallen and corrupt creature! [Genesis 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 5.3). How different the one from the other, may be conjectured from the conduct of this first-born, who imbrued his hands in his brother's blood. In his account too, as well of the post-diluvian, as of the ante-diluvian world, he tells us, that "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually! [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5); [Genesis 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.21)."

Job, not only affirms the same awful truth, but shows us that it is impossible in the nature of things to be otherwise; since from a thing that is radically and essentially impure—nothing but what is impure can proceed! [Job 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.4); [Job 15:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.14-16); [Job 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 25.4).

The testimony of Isaiah and Jeremiah is altogether to the same effect, [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5). [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9); as is that also of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 9:3.

And in the New Testament, our Lord himself teaches us to regard the heart as the proper womb where every species of iniquity is generated, and from whence it proceeds! [Mark 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21).

And Paul declares of himself, as well as all the rest of the human race, that they "are by nature children of wrath! [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3)."

But how can we be in such a state by nature, if we are not corrupt? Can God regard as objects of his wrath creatures that possess his perfect image? No; it is as fallen in Adam that he views us, and as inheriting a depraved nature that he abhors us!

The subject does not lead us to notice Adam as a federal head; and therefore we confine ourselves to what lies immediately before us.

2. We see the original sinfulness of every person from collateral evidence.

Whence was it that God appointed the painful and bloody rite of circumcision to be administered to infants of eight days old, but to show that they brought into the world with them a corrupt nature, which it was the bounden duty of all who were in covenant with him to mortify and subdue? While, on the one hand, it sealed to them the blessings of the covenant; it intimated to them, on the other hand, that they needed to have "their hearts circumcised, to love the Lord their God."

Why is it that every child, from the first moment that he begins to act at all, manifests corrupt tempers and dispositions? If only some, and those the children of wicked men, evinced such depravity, we might be led to account for it in some other way; but when, with the exception of one or two who were sanctified from the womb, this has been the state of every child that has been born into the world, we are constrained to acknowledge, that our very nature is corrupt, and that, as David tells us, "we are estranged from the womb, and go astray as soon as we are born [Psalm 58:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 58.3)."

Further, how can we account for the sufferings and death of infants, but on the supposition that they are partakers of Adam's guilt and corruption? Sufferings and death are the penalty of sin; and we cannot conceive that God would inflict that penalty on millions of infants, if they were not in some way or other liable to his wrath. Paul notices this, as a compelling proof that all of Adam's posterity fell in him, and through him are partakers of guilt and misery! [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12).

Once more, Why is it that all need a Savior? If children are not, in the eye of God, transgressors of his law, they cannot need to be redeemed from its curse. But Christ is as much the Savior of infants as of adults. We find no intimation in the Scriptures that any are saved without Christ; on the contrary, it is said, that, "as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive." In the temple shown to Ezekiel, there was one door for the prince; it was the door by which the Lord God had entered; and was to be forever closed to all except the prince, [Ezekiel 44:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 44.2-3).

So Christ alone enters into Heaven by his own merits; to all besides him that door is closed. Just so, Christ alone is the door by which we must all enter in Heaven; he is the only way to the Father; nor, as long as the world shall stand, shall any come unto the Father but by him! [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.9); [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6).

These things then, especially, as taken in connection with the many express declarations before quoted, are decisive proofs, that David's account of himself was true, and that it is equally true of all the human race.

This truth being established, we proceed to mark,

II. The importance of adverting to original sin in estimating our state before God.

Unless we bear in mind the total corruption of our nature, we can never estimate aright:

1. Our individual actions.

Even in common courts of judicature, the great object of inquiry is, not so much the act that has been done, as the mind of the agent; and, according as that appears to have been depraved or blameless, the sentence of condemnation or acquittal is passed upon him.

Precisely thus must we judge ourselves in our conduct towards God. To elucidate this part of our subject, we will suppose two people to have been guilty of the same act of treason towards an earthly sovereign, but to have differed widely from each other in respect of the mind with which they acted.

One entered upon it unwittingly, and without any consciousness that he was doing wrong; the other knowingly, and aware that he was rebelling against his lawful sovereign.

One did it reluctantly, through the influence of one whom he could not easily withstand; but the did it other willingly, as a volunteer in the service, and as following the impulse of his own mind.

One went without premeditation, being taken hastily and off his guard; the other with a fixed purpose, after much plotting and deliberation.

In one it was a solitary act, altogether contrary to the whole of his former life; in the other it was frequent, as often as the temptation arose, or the occasion offered.

The one proceeded with moderation, not having his heart at all engaged in it; the other with a fiery zeal, abhorring in his soul the authority he opposed.

The one had his mind open to conviction, and might easily be prevailed upon to renounce his error; the other was filled with self-approbation and self-applause, thinking nothing of his risks and dangers, if he might but help forward the utter subversion of the government.

Take these two people, and say whether, notwithstanding their acts were in appearance the same, there would not be an immense difference between the measure of their criminality in the estimation of an upright judge? There can be no doubt on this subject.

Take then any other sin whatever, (for all sin is treason against the King of kings;) and examine how far it has been voluntary, deliberate, habitual; how far it has been against light and knowledge; and how far it has proceeded from a heart radically averse to God and holiness.

Let sins of omission be examined in this way, as well as sins of commission; and then the things which now are accounted light and trivial, will appear hateful in the extreme, not merely as blighted "grapes of a degenerate vine," but as "grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrah;" their enormity will be felt, in proportion to the strength and fixedness of the principle from which they spring.

2. Our general character.

If our actions have not been openly sinful, we are ready to bless ourselves as having but little ground for shame and remorse. But if we consider "the enmity of the carnal mind against God," and view our utter lack of all holy affections, and exceeding proneness to some besetting sins—we shall see but little reason to glory over the vilest of mankind.

We shall see abundant cause indeed for thankfulness to God, who by his preventing grace has restrained us from many evils into which others have run; but we shall take no credit to ourselves as better than others.

If we behold heinous sins in others, we must realize that there is the root of all sin in ourselves.

If we see in others the streams of wickedness, we shall bear in mind, that the fountain-head of it all is in ourselves also.

Thus, however free we may be from any flagrant enormity, we shall be ready to acknowledge with Paul, that "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwells no good thing!" And with Job to say, "Behold, I am vile! I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes."

So far from indulging self-delight and self-esteem, we shall find no names more suited to us than those by which Paul designated his own character, "Less than the least of all saints!" and "The very chief of sinners! [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8). [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)."

From this view of our natural corruption, we may **learn**,

1. How greatly we need the renewing influence of God's Spirit.

Outward amendment might suffice for outward sins; but where the heart itself is so corrupt, we must have "a new heart given to us," and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds." With such corrupt hearts as ours, it would be impossible for us to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, or to enjoy it even if we were there; we could not bear the sight of so holy a God; nor endure to spend our lives in such holy employments! Know then, that "old things must pass away; and all things must become new." "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh;" the stream can rise no higher than the fountain-head. If you would enjoy the things of the Spirit, you must be "born of the Spirit," who alone can impart the faculties necessary for that end. Let your prayer then be like that of David, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me! verse 10."

2. How carefully we should watch against temptation.

If we carried with us a load of gun-powder which a single spark would cause to explode—then we would be extremely careful to avoid whatever might subject us to danger. Should we not then, with hearts so corrupt, and with temptations so thick around us—look well to our ways, and pray unto our God to keep us from the evils of an ensnaring world? Well did our blessed Lord say, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation;" "The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak."

Who that reflects on David's state previous to his fall, does not fear for himself, and cry mightily unto God, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" "Uphold me with your free Spirit, and take not your Holy Spirit from me!" To all then we say, "Do not be high-minded, but fear;" "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall!"

#588

THE IMPORTANCE OF INWARD INTEGRITY

**[Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6)**

"Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part you shall make me to know wisdom."

Mankind at large are chiefly concerned of their outward conduct; but the child of God cannot rest in mere externals; he is concerned about the internal habits of his soul; and desires to have them conformed to the mind and will of God.

The words before us strongly express this idea. We think that the words relate, not to his sins, but his repentance for them. The sense of them appears to be to this effect, "You require me to be truly sincere in my present humiliation; and, if I am, as I desire to be, thoroughly sincere, you will make this whole dispensation a source of the most important instruction to my soul." In this view of the words, they are a humble address to God, declarative of,

I. The heart disposition which God requires.

"Truth," is a conformity of our feelings and actions to our professions; and this God requires of us in the whole of our spirit and conduct.

1. God requires truth in our **acknowledgments**.

We acknowledge ourselves to be sinners before God. But such a confession is of no value in his sight, unless it is accompanied with suitable feelings. Think then:

What befits us, as sinners!

What deep sorrow and contrition we should feel for having offended Almighty God!

What self-loathing and self-abhorrence for our extreme vileness and baseness!

What ardent desires after mercy!

What readiness to justify God in all that he may be pleased to inflict upon us in this world, whatever means or instruments he may see fit to use; yes, and in the eternal world also, even if he casts us into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, and make us everlasting monuments of his wrathful indignation!

This should be the state and habit of our minds; we should have "our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust," "crying, Unclean, unclean!" In a word, we should adopt from our inmost souls the language of Job, "Behold, I am vile! Therefore I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes!"

In proportion as we feel thus, we are upright, and have "truth in our inward parts;" but so far as we are lacking in these feelings, we are hypocrites in heart," drawing near to God with our lips in a way belied by our hearts, [Matthew 15:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-8)."

2. God requires truth in our **purposes**.

We profess, as people redeemed by the blood of our incarnate God, to give up ourselves to him, and to live unto Him who died for us; and, if we are sincere in this, then our determination is fixed, that, with God's help, nothing shall ever keep us from executing this intention. We have deliberately counted the cost. We are aware, that "if we will live godly in Christ Jesus, we must suffer persecution;" but we are prepared to meet it, from whatever quarter it may come, yes, though "our greatest foes should be those of our own household." We are ready to sacrifice our reputation, our interests, and our very lives also, rather than in any respect deny our God, or allow ourselves to be diverted from the path of duty. We are determined, through grace, to put away everything that may retard our progress heavenward, and to aspire after the highest possible attainments in righteousness and true holiness.

Now God requires, that we should be acting up to this profession, "setting our face as a flint against the whole world," and standing in the posture of Daniel or the Hebrew youths, willing to have our bodies consigned to a den of lions, or a fiery furnace—rather than violate our duty by any sinful compliance. If we are halting or hesitating, we have not truth in our inward parts.

3. God requires truth in our **endeavors**.

Purposes must be judged of by the exertions that are put forth in order to carry them into effect. A diligent attendance therefore on all the means of grace must of necessity be required of us. In the public ordinances, and in our private chambers, whether we are hearing, or reading, or meditating, or praying, we must be like men in earnest, even like the man-slayer fleeing from the pursuer of blood, who scarcely stopped to look behind him, until he should reach the appointed sanctuary, the city of refuge.

Remissness in such a cause argues a lack of real integrity; if truth is indeed in our inward parts, we shall run as in a race, which leaves us no time to loiter; and wrestle with all our might, lest we be foiled in the contest. We mus fight as those who know that there is no alternative but to overcome or perish. In all the interior workings of our minds we shall resemble the Corinthians, who were "clear in this matter, 2 Corinthians 7:11."

That we may not be discouraged by the strictness of God's requirements, let us consider:

II. The benefits which God will confer.

There is a wisdom that is to be gained only by experience; what has its seat in the head, may be learned by the head; what dwells in the heart, must be learned by the heart; and of the heart there is but one teacher, even God; according as it is said, "Who teaches like God! [Job 36:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.22)."

Among the treasures of wisdom which God will impart to the truly upright, and the hidden things which he will cause them to know, are:

1. The **deceits of the heart**.

These are very deep, and absolutely unsearchable, [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9); yet in a measure will God reveal them to those who have truth in their inward parts. The world at large know nothing of them, "they are calling evil good, and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; and bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20);" "they feed also on ashes; a deceived heart has turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)." They contrive to satisfy their minds that all is well with them, or at least to lull their consciences asleep with the hope that all will be well with them before they die. They have a thousand pleas and excuses which they urge in their own defense, and which they vainly hope will be accepted by their Judge. If we attempt to open their eyes, they reply, with indignation, "Are we blind also? [John 9:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.40)." Thus are they both blinded and "hardened" through the deceitfulness of sin.

But those who are really "Israelites indeed, and without deceit," have their eyes opened to see what delusions they have cherished; and being thus "brought out of darkness into marvelous light." "Their eye being made single, their whole body is full of light."

2. The **devices of Satan**.

The men of this world, though "taken in his snares, and led captive by him at his will," have no idea of his agency. But he is a subtle adversary; and his "wiles" are innumerable. He can even "transform himself into an angel of light, [2 Corinthians 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13-14);" and, when aiming a deadly blow at our souls, assume the garb of "a minister of righteousness."

His first device is to persuade men that they are in no danger of the judgments they fear.

If he fails in that, he will instill into their minds the notion that they have gone too far, and that there is no hope for them.

If that snare does not succeed, he will draw them aside, after some points of less importance, or "matters of doubtful disputation."

He has multitudes of false teachers at his command, who will gladly aid him in this accursed work, [2 Corinthians 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13), and concur with him in his endeavors to "corrupt their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3)." But, if we are following the Lord fully, he will not leave us "ignorant of Satan's devices, or allow him to get his wished-for advantage over us, [2 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.11)." He will arm us against that adversary, and enable us to withstand him, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11). He will give us "the shield of faith, whereby we shall ward off and quench all his fiery darts, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16)," and be able so to "resist him, that he shall flee from us, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7)."

3. The **mysteries of grace**.

"Great is the mystery of godliness," and great is the mystery of grace, whether we consider the work wrought for us by Jesus Christ, or the work wrought in us by his Holy Spirit. These constitute that "wisdom, which is foolishness with man," and which "the natural man cannot receive, because it is spiritually discerned, [1 Corinthians 2:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.7-9); [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)." To know this, we must be taught of God, "We must receive, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, before we can know the things that are freely given to us by God, [1 Corinthians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.10); 1 Corinthians 2:12." And O! how wonderful a work does this appear, when "God shines into our hearts to reveal it to us, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)."

How worthy of God!

How suitable to man!

How surpassing comprehension, whether of men or angels!

Truly, the man whose eyes are thus opened, seems to be brought into a new world! "Old things are passed away, and all things are become new." The ignorant world are amazed at the new line of conduct he pursues, just as Elisha's servant was at his master's confidence in the midst of danger. But, if their eyes were opened to see, as the believer does, the invisible God, [2 Kings 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.15-17). [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27), above him and within him, they would wonder rather, that there were any bounds to his transports, or any limit to his exertions.

4. The **beauties of holiness**.

All who are warped by their prejudices, or blinded by their lusts, are incapable of estimating aright the beauty and blessedness of true piety; it appears to them little short of madness. And even those who make a profession of godliness, but possess not truth in their inward parts, have very erroneous conceptions of true holiness.

Some place true holiness in a confident espousal of certain principles, or a zealous attachment to a particular party.

Others, inclining more to practical religion, make all duty to center in some one point—such as the mortification of the flesh, or almsgiving, or penances of man's invention. Even those who are more enlightened, are apt to regard only one particular set of graces that are more congenial with their own feelings, and to neglect those which are of an opposite aspect; one despising everything in comparison with zeal and confidence; another leaning altogether to the side of prudence and timidity.

But the man into whose hidden part God has put true wisdom—views holiness, not with prismatic partiality, separating one grace from another, but all embodied, as light in the sun; every grace tempering its opposite, and all combining to the production of perfect beauty. He discards neither the vivid nor the darker ray; but, having all in united exercise, sorrow with joy, and fear with confidence, "the beauty of the Lord his God is upon him, [Psalm 90:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.17)," and he shines in the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

From this subject we may **learn**,

1. Why is it that men get so little insight into the Gospel.

Many hear the Gospel during their whole lives, and never attain any just knowledge of it. How shall we account for this? We suppose the Gospel to be preached with all possible fidelity, and yet it seems never to convey any light to their minds. The reason is, that they never take any pains to apply it to their own souls, or to get any one truth realized in their own experience. They assent to everything they hear; but they are content with being hearers, without ever once attempting to become doers of the Word they hear. They "see perhaps their face, as in a looking-glass, for the moment; but they go away, and forget what manner of men they are, [James 1:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.22-25)." But our blessed Lord has told us, that we must aim at doing his will, in order to get any just insight into what he has revealed, [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17); and, as this desire is altogether lacking in the people we are speaking of, they never derive any solid benefit from the Gospel.

O brethren! you must "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls!" You must apply the Word to your own hearts; when you hear your sins pointed out, you must endeavor to humble yourselves for them in dust and ashes; when you hear of Christ as the one and only Savior of a ruined world, you must endeavor to flee to him for refuge; when the Holy Spirit is set forth as the one great source of all spiritual life and motion, you must cry to God the Father for his dear Son's sake to send the Holy Spirit into your hearts, that the whole work of grace may be wrought within you. It is your neglect of thus harrowing the gospel seed into your hearts by meditation, and of watering it with tears, that has given Satan an opportunity of taking it out of your hearts as soon as ever it has been sown there! [Matthew 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.4); [Matthew 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.19).

Get the "honest and the good heart," which truly desires to make a just improvement of the word, and God will yet cause the seed to spring up in your hearts, and to bring forth fruit to the salvation of your souls.

2. Why is it that so many who profess the Gospel, live so unworthy of it.

It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess godliness walk very unworthy of their high calling. Like Ezekiel's hearers, they are gratified with the preaching of the Gospel, as people are with "one who plays well upon an instrument; but their heart still goes after their covetousness, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32)," or some other besetting sin. But this is owing to their not having "truth in their inward parts;" if they had, they would not be satisfied with merely professing the Gospel and talking about it, and looking with pity (or perhaps with contempt) on those who do not understand it. No!

They would look to their heart, that it should be meek and humble;  
they would look to their conduct also, that it should be blameless and without deceit;  
they would "give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."  
  
Ah, brethren! think what God requires of all, and of those who make a profession of religion more especially; and beg of God to endue your souls with truth and wisdom, "that you may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ."

You may imagine that you "know all the depths of Satan, [Revelation 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.24);" but if your professed "hope in Christ does not purify your souls as Christ is pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)," then you are yet blinded by him, and utterly deceiving your own souls, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26).

3. How to get the Word of God wrought in our souls.

Come to the Gospel with hearts tender and contrite, that they may be to it as wax to the seal. Then you shall have in your own souls "the witness" of all its most important truths, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10); and shall be able to answer from your own experience that question which God puts so triumphantly to all the world, "Does not my Word do good to him who walks uprightly?" You are not straitened in God; be not straitened in your own souls. Desire much; ask much; expect much—and God will supply your every need "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus!"

#589

THE MEANS OF DELIVERANCE FROM SPIRITUAL LEPROSY

**[Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7)**

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!"

Every part of God's Word is profitable for our instruction in righteousness; but in the Psalms, true religion is exemplified, and, as it were, embodied.

The workings of genuine repentance are admirably delineated in the Psalm before us. David traces his iniquities to their proper source, his original corruption. He acknowledges the necessity of a thorough renovation of soul; and, in legal terms, but of evangelical import, he implores forgiveness.

The expressions in the text teach us,

I. The nature of sin.

The generality of the world imagine sin to be a light and trivial thing.

Some indeed have learned to dread sin as destructive of their eternal happiness.

Very few have any idea of sin as defiling and debasing the soul.

It is in this view, however, that we are now called to consider it.

Sin has defiled every member of our body, and every faculty of our soul. Hence Paul speaks of it as "filthiness both of the flesh and spirit 2 Corinthians 7:1."

What uncircumcised ears, [Acts 7:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.51),  
what venomous tongues, [James 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.6),  
what adulterous eyes, [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14),  
have the greater part of mankind! See [Romans 3:10-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-19).  
  
How are all their members used as instruments of unrighteousness! [Romans 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.13). What pride, and envy, what wrath, and malice, are harbored in the bosom! How gladly would we cast off all allegiance to God, and be a god unto ourselves, [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4).

Thus, in fleshly lusts, we degrade ourselves almost to a level with the beasts! [2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.22); and, in spiritual filthiness, we too much resemble the fallen angels, [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44). How different is this state from that in which we were first created! [Genesis 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.27). Yet the change is effected solely by the agency of sin! [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12).

In this view, more especially, is sin represented in the text.

The Psalmist evidently refers to the state of a leper, or a leprous house. No disorder was more loathsome than leprosy, [Leviticus 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.8). A person infected with it was driven from the society of his dearest relatives, and was necessitated to proclaim his impurity to all who approached him, [Leviticus 13:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.44-46). Nor could his disorder ever be cured by the art of man. If he were ever healed, it was by God alone, without the intervention of human means. Hence David, knowing the filthiness and incurableness of sin, cries unto God.

Similar representations also abound in every part of the sacred writings.

Our natural depravity is declared in expressions of the like import, [Job 15:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.14-16).

Our acquired corruptions are said to render us loathsome objects, [Proverbs 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.5).

The very remains of sin in the holiest of men are also described in similar terms, [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24). The allusion seems to be to a dead body, which was sometimes fastened to criminals, until they died in consequence of the stench arising from it. In such a light did Paul view the remains of sin which he felt within him; yes, the most eminent saints, in bewailing their sinfulness, have used the very same figure as David in the text, [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5). Happy would it be for us, if we had these views of sin; we should soon put away our proud, self-exalting thoughts, and should adopt the confessions of holy Job, [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21); [Job 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-31).

But, vile as sin is, it may be both forgiven and subdued!

II. The means of deliverance from sin.

It has been already observed, that David alludes to the case of a leper. This is manifest from the terms wherein he implores deliverance. Under Jewish figures he sets forth the only means of salvation.

Certain means were prescribed by God for the purification of a leper, [Leviticus 14:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.2-7). When God had healed him, "the priest was to take two clean birds, with cedar-wood, scarlet, and hyssop." Having killed one of the birds, the priest was to "dip the hyssop and the live bird in the blood of the bird that had been slain;" he was then to "sprinkle the leper seven times, and to let loose the living bird." This ordinance typified the death of Christ, with his resurrection, and subsequent ascension into Heaven with his own blood, [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12).

A similar ordinance is explained by the Apostle in this very manner, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14), and the same effect is plainly ascribed to the things here typified, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25)." It is therefore in reference to Christ that David says, "Purge me with hyssop."

In the purification of a leprous house, water was used with the blood, [Leviticus 14:48-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.48-53). This further typified the renewing influences of the Spirit of Christ, and David seems to allude to it, when he adds, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!"

Nor is this by any means a forced or fanciful distinction. An inspired writer lays peculiar stress upon it, [1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.6), and every enlightened person sees as much need of Christ's Spirit to wash him from the defilement of sin, as of his blood to purge him from the guilt of sin.

The efficacy ascribed to these means is not at all exaggerated. There is no sin whatever which the blood of Christ cannot cleanse. We cannot conceive more enormous transgressions than those of David—yet even he could say with confidence, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean!" Purified in this way, his soul would become "whiter than snow." This blessed truth is attested by the beloved Apostle, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7), and it is urged by God himself as an inducement to repentance, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18). Our renewal indeed by the Holy Spirit is not perfect in this life, but it shall be continually progressive towards perfection, [2 Corinthians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.16), and, when the leprous tabernacle shall be taken down, it shall be reared anew in consummate purity and beauty! [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1). [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21).

INFERENCES.

1. How mistaken are those who seek salvation by any righteousness of their own!

We can no more eradicate sin from our souls, than a leprosy from our bodies. No man ever more deeply bewailed his sin, or more thoroughly turned from it than David [Psalm 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.6); [Psalm 38:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.4-6)—yet he did not say, "Purge me with my tears, my repentances, or my duties—but purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;" he would make mention of no righteousness but that of Christ [Psalm 71:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 71.15-16); nor would Paul himself trust for a moment in any other, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9).

Shall we then boast as if we were more penitent than David, more zealous than Paul? Let us rather humble ourselves in the language of Job, [Job 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.15) and [40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4), and determine to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

2. What encouragement is here afforded to mourning penitents!

If David did not despair of mercy—then who else can have cause to do so? If the blood of Christ could so purge him—then why may it not cleanse us also? If it had such efficacy a thousand years before it was shed, surely it will not be less efficacious now that it has been poured forth.

But it is not the mere shedding of Christ's blood that will profit us. We must, by faith, apply it to our own souls. Let us then go to the blood of sprinkling which speaks such good things to us, [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24); let us cry with earnest and repeated entreaties, "Purge me! Wash me!" thus shall our polluted souls be whiter than snow itself, and before long we shall join, in that general chorus, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6).

#590

THE OPERATIONS OF SIN AND OF GRACE

**[Psalm 51:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.8)**

"Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which you have broken may rejoice!"

Next to the obtaining of pardon, a penitent will desire the manifestation of that pardon to his soul. A state of suspense on such a subject as the forgiveness of sins, is too painful to be endured without earnest prayer to God for the removal of it. We do not wonder, therefore, that the Psalmist, after imploring mercy at the hands of God through the blood of the great Sacrifice, should seek a restoration of peace and joy; for, in truth, a soul that has once tasted peace with God, and known the joy of his salvation—can never be satisfied until it basks in the beams of divine love, and has the light of God's countenance lifted up upon it.

The terms in which the Psalmist implores this blessing, will lead me to show,

I. The power of sin to wound the soul.

We may all have some idea of the anguish arising from broken bones. But that is small, in comparison with that which is brought upon the soul by sin. "The spirit of a man will sustain any bodily infirmity; but who can bear a wounded spirit?" Deep indeed are the wounds inflicted by sin, in the case of:

1. An unconverted sinner.

Hear the desponding complaint of Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." He felt himself to be an outcast from God and man; and was haunted by a guilty conscience, which was ever tormenting him with its accusations, and causing him to anticipate, with terrible apprehensions, his final doom.

The state of Judas was not less appalling than his. The traitor had promised himself much pleasure from the wages of his iniquity; but no sooner had he betrayed his Lord, than he was filled with remorse, and constrained to confess his guilt, and could no longer retain the money with which he had been bribed—yes, he could no longer endure his very existence, but went and hanged himself.

Previous to the commission, sin appears but a light and trivial evil; and, even after it has been committed, often leaves the mind in a state of extreme insensibility and obduracy. But let it once be brought home to the conscience by the operation of the Spirit of God, and sin will inflict a wound there, which will be a foretaste of Hell itself, even "a certain looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation that shall consume the soul forever!"

2. A backsliding saint.

The example of Peter may teach us the bitter effects of sin on a mind susceptible of its enormity. What pangs did he feel, when his Divine Master looked upon him, and fixed conviction on his soul! No longer able to contain himself, "he went out and wept bitterly."

But let us fix our attention more particularly on David, whose words we are considering. Under a sense of his enormous guilt he cries out, "O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart! [Psalm 38:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-8)."

In another Psalm he still further complains, "My soul is full of troubles; and my life draws near unto the grave. You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Your wrath lies hard upon me, and you have afflicted me with all your waves! [Psalm 88:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.3); [Psalm 88:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.6-7)."

Who that hears these bitter wailings must not acknowledge that sin is a tremendous evil. Even though evil is a sweet morsel in your mouth for a season—it will at last bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder!

Let us, not, however, be so intent on the power of sin to wound the soul, as to forget,

II. The power of grace to heal sin.

What were the sins which had broken David's bones? Adultery and murder. And was it possible that these heinous sins should be forgiven, and that the person who had committed them should ever "hear again of joy and gladness?" Yes; there is nothing too hard for God's power to effect; nothing too great for his mercy to bestow.

The provision made for sinners in the Gospel is adequate to the necessities of all.

This is a blessed truth, and full of the richest consolation. If there were any bounds to the mercy of God, or to the merits of his dear Son—then millions of the human race must sit down in utter despair. But, when we learn that Christ is "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of men" and that "his blood cleanses from all sin, "when we are informed also, that people who are accepted in the Beloved, stand before God "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, and are holy and without blemish;" none can say, "There is no hope for me." On the contrary, even David himself is authorised to say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!"

The man who lays hold on the Gospel shall have all his sorrows turned into joy.

Of this, David himself was an eminent example. Even he could say, "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness! [Psalm 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.11)." Who can tell the full efficacy of "the balm of Gilead?" "Who can fully declare what peace and joy are imparted to the sinner, when God lifts upon him the light of his reconciled countenance? Truly, the peace that is then imparted to his soul "passes all understanding;" and "the joy" that flows in upon him "is unspeakable and full of glory."

Behold the converts on the day of Pentecost, or the Philippian jailer, when, once the Savior was revealed to him; how speedily were all their sorrows dissipated, and their griefs turned into the sublimest joy!

And cannot many among ourselves attest that God is still the same, and that his grace is as effectual as ever for the reviving and the comforting of the contrite soul! [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15). Be it known to all, that "God will not contend forever; neither will he be always angry; lest the spirit should fail before him, and the souls which he has made, [Isaiah 57:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.16)."

We may LEARN from hence,

1. What folly it is to "make a mock at sin".

Yes truly; they are justly called fools" who do so; for while sin robs us of our innocence, it can create a very Hell upon earth. And who is he, against whom it may not prevail?

Look at David, the man after God's own heart; see from what an eminence he fell, and into what an abyss of guilt and misery! Does not his example speak loudly to us all? Does it not say to every one of us, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall?"

Beware, then, of sin; beware of the very first motions of sin in the soul. "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles!" And let all of us "flee from sin, as from the face of a serpent;" and cry daily unto God to "hold us up in his arms, that our footsteps do not slip!"

2. What a mercy it is that the Gospel is sounding in our ears!

Where can the weary and heavy-laden soul find rest, but in Christ Jesus? What hope could David ever have entertained, if he had not looked to the great sacrifice to purge away his sin? The Law did not so much as prescribe any offering for such sins as his; and if he had not looked forward to the Gospel—then he must have died without hope. But his broken bones were healed by a sight of Christ; and so shall ours be, if we "flee for refuge to Him, as to the hope that is set before us."

To all, then, I will say: Improve your privileges; and if your bones are broken with a sense of sin, the prophet's counsel is given you this day by my mouth, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up! [Hosea 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.1)."

#591

TRUE RENOVATION OF HEART

**[Psalm 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.10)**

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!"

Pardon and peace are the first blessings which a penitent man will seek. But no true penitent will be satisfied with them; he will desire with no less ardor the renovation of his soul in righteousness and true holiness.

The Psalm before us gives a just epitome of the penitent's mind. David begins with fervent supplications for pardon, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions!" He comes afterwards to implore a sense of God's forgiving love, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which you have broken may rejoice." He then desires a restoration of his soul to the divine image, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

In these words we may see:

I. The great constituents of true piety.

A mere reformation of life, however exemplary, will be no better than the painting of a sepulcher, which is "full of rottenness and all impurity."

1. If we would be accepted by God, we must have a

clean (pure) heart.

"The heart of fallen man is full of evil, [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3);" and from it, as from its proper source, all manner of evil proceeds, [Mark 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21-23). God himself has testified respecting it, that "all its thoughts and imaginations are evil, [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5)." Hence there is an in dispensable necessity, that the heart should be renewed by grace; for, if left in an unrenewed state, it could not enjoy Heaven, even if it were admitted there. Being altogether corrupt, it could not delight itself in the presence of a holy God, or find satisfaction in those exercises of praise in which the glorified saints and angels are incessantly engaged. To find happiness in God and holy exercises, the heart must:  
acquire a totally different taste;  
be radically changed;  
be cleansed from all its corrupt propensities;  
be made averse from sin; and  
all its powers must be sanctified unto the Lord.

2. If we would be accepted by God, we must have a right spirit.

By a "right" spirit is meant a "steadfast" spirit. A man, even after he is once cleansed, is yet prone to sin. He is beset with temptations both from without and within; and he needs to "be strengthened with might in his inner man," in order that he may be able to withstand them. It will be in vain that he has been once "cleansed from the pollutions of the world; if he is ever again entangled with them and overcome, "His last end will be worse than the beginning! [2 Peter 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20)." He must "be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, 1 Corinthians 15:58," if ever he would find acceptance at the last. "He must endure unto the end, if ever he would be saved."

Seeing that these things are so necessary, let us inquire,

II. How true piety is to be obtained.

True piety is not the work of man, but of God alone!

1. True piety is God's work in its **commencement**.

The giving of a pure heart is justly called "a new creation." "Create in me a pure heart, O God." Hence he who is in Christ is called "a new creation [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)."

When we survey the heavenly bodies, we see and know that they cannot have been the work of any created being; the impress of Divinity is stamped upon them!

Just so, it is certain that a new heart must be the gift of God. True it is, that God has said, "Get a new heart, and a right spirit; for why will you die? [Ezekiel 18:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.31)." But it is also true, that God has promised to give it to us, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws! [Ezekiel 36:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-26)." Here all is the gift of God; and it is to be obtained from God in the exercise of prayer and faith. It is our duty to have a pure heart, but since we cannot do it of ourselves, we are to turn the command into a petition, "Create it in me, O God!" And, to show us that such petitions shall not be in vain, God makes our petition the subject of an express promise, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you." This points out the true way of obtaining all spiritual blessings. We must be sensible that it is our duty to possess them; but, from a consciousness of our inability to obtain them by any efforts of our own, we must cry to God for them, and plead with him the promises which he has given us in the Son of his love. "Laying hold on these promises," we shall obtain the strength which we stand in need of; and shall be enabled to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

2. True piety is God's work in its **progress**.

Stability of mind is as much the gift of God as regeneration itself; it is He alone who can "make us perfect; establish, strengthen, and settle us, [1 Peter 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.10)."

We need only look to David for an illustration of this truth. What man ever lived, on whom you might depend more fully than on him? He was "a man after God's own heart, "disciplined in the school of adversity, and honored with divine communications to as great an extent as the most favored of the men. Yet behold, how he fell!

Look at Solomon also. Who that had seen him at the dedication of the temple, would have ever supposed that he should betray such weakness and folly as he did, during the greater part of his reign? Alas! "what is man," if left to himself—if left only for a single instant? If God is not with him to uphold him, he will become the sport of every temptation, "driven to and fro with every wind," whether of sentiment or of feeling, [Ephesians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.14). He must be assisted in every part of his duty, whether of "putting off the old man, or putting on the new." The same Almighty power which raised Christ from the dead must work mightily in him, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20), to "renew him in the spirit of his mind, [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23-24)," until the whole work of God is perfected within him; and to the last hour of his life his prayer must be, "May the very God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, make me perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in me that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Christ Jesus, [Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21)."

Address,

1. To those who feel no need of such a change as is described in our text.

By the generality of religious people, such a change is deemed no better than a wild enthusiastic conceit; and if a man have been baptized into the faith of Christ, and been enabled to maintain an honorable and consistent walk through life, he is conceived to be in a state of perfect safety.

But had not Nicodemus been admitted into covenant with God in the way prescribed by God himself, and in the only way in which any were or could be admitted under the Mosaic dispensation? And was he not a person of most exemplary character? Yet to him did our Lord say again and again, "You must be born again;" and if a man be not born again, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3); [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5); [John 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.7)." To get rid of this awful admonition, many will identify regeneration with the act of baptism, under an idea that the inward grace must of necessity accompany the outward sign. But if this is the case in one sacrament, it must be equally so in the other; whereas we are told, that a man may partake of the Lord's supper unworthily; and, instead of being saved by it, may only "eat and drink to his own damnation, [1 Corinthians 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.29)." Just so, a man may render baptism the means of his more aggravated condemnation; as Simon Magus actually did; for he continued as much "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity" after his baptism, as he was before, with the additional guilt of his hypocrisy in having applied for baptism in a state altogether unworthy to receive it, [Acts 8:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.21-23).

Beloved brethren, whatever men may say, you must be born again of the Spirit, as well as of water; you must become "new creatures in Christ Jesus;" and if God creates not in you a pure heart, and renews not in you a right spirit, Satan himself may hope for Heaven as well as you; for, if there be any truth in the Word of God, "without holiness," real, inward, universal holiness—no man shall see the Lord! [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14)."

2. Those who profess to have experienced it.

There are two things against which I would particularly take occasion to guard you; the one is presumption; the other is despondency.

PRESUMPTION. You have probably heard people speak of divine grace being an imperishable seed; which, once bestowed, must of necessity bring a man to glory. But it is the Word of God which is the only imperishable seed, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23); nor is there in the universe a man who is authorised to say, 'I cannot fall.'

The man who cannot see his frailty in the character of David, and his inability to restore himself in the long impenitence of David, will probably be left to learn these things by bitter experience. But to every man among you "that has an ear to hear," I would say, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12)." And if I were speaking even to a prophet of the Most High, and he as eminent as David himself, I would whisper in his ear this beneficial caution, "Do not be high-minded, but fear! [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20)."

DESPONDENCY. Yet, if there be here one who has fallen into sin, I would say, Do not despair! as though there were not mercy enough in the bosom of your God to pardon you, or power enough in his arm to keep you. Yes, if, like David, you had committed the aggravated crimes of adultery and murder, I would still point you to the great Sacrifice, even to the Lord Jesus Christ; and would put into your mouth that prayer of David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! verse 7."

I would, however, remind such a one, that it will not be enough for him to obtain pardon and peace; he must have "a pure heart created in him, and a right and steadfast spirit renewed within him," if ever he would "see the face of God in peace."

Yet I would add, that there is nothing impossible with God; and that he who magnified his mercy in the salvation of an adulterous and murderous David—will "cast out none who come to him" in humility and faith, as David did!

#592

THE PENITENT ENCOURAGED

**[Psalm 51:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.14)**

"Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God—the God of my salvation! And my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness!"

This Psalm is full of encouragement to a real penitent; but in particular the petition before us, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God!"

Consider the atrocious crime committed—"Blood-guiltiness!" Murder—the most atrocious murder that ever was committed.

Consider by whom it had been committed—"Deliver me!" The man after God's own heart, who had experienced from God more signal interpositions than almost any other man that ever breathed.

Consider the long and inconceivable obduracy which he had indulged since the commission of it, even to the very hour when his guilt was charged upon him by the Prophet of the Lord.

Could such a sin as this be forgiven? Could such an offender dare to ask forgiveness, or entertain the remotest hope of obtaining it? Surely, if David could approach his God under such circumstances as these, with the smallest hope of acceptance, then may we see in this passage,

I. The privilege of a contrite soul.

There is not a sinner in the universe who may not go to God, as "a God of salvation!"

Were there only a hope that mercy might be a constituent of the divine character, and an attribute which might by some possibility be displayed—it would be a sufficient encouragement to the vilest sinner upon earth to call upon his God. But the title here assigned to the Most High, opens to us a most wonderful view of his character.  
He is "a God of salvation;"  
as having devised a way of salvation for a ruined world;  
as having given us his only dear Son to effect salvation;  
as having accepted the sacrifice of his Son in our behalf;  
and, as applying that salvation to those whom "he has chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began."

He is "a God of salvation," as making the redemption of the world his great concern. Yes, as altogether occupied in it; so as, if I may so speak, to be swallowed up in it, and to be "a God of it." We read of him as "a God of patience and consolation," yes, "a God of all grace;" but the title given in my text meets most fully the necessities of sinful mankind, and opens a door of hope to every sinner under Heaven.

Nor is there a sin which, if truly repented of, shall not be forgiven.

We read, indeed, of the sin against the Holy Spirit, as excepted from the tremendous catalogue of pardonable sins. But it is not excepted because of its enormity, as though it were too great to be forgiven; but only because that sin implies a willful and deliberate rejection of the only means of salvation. It destroys, not because it exceeds the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood, but because it tramples on that blood which alone can expiate even the smallest sin. A man who determinately rejects all food, needs not to do anything else to ensure his own destruction; he rejects the necessary means of life, and therefore must inevitably perish.

But we may say without exception, that "the blood of Jesus Christ both can and will cleanse from all sin," if only we sprinkle it upon our conscience, and trust in it for salvation. It is worthy of observation that the Psalmist expresses no doubt as to the possibility of his acceptance with God. He does not say, "If such guilt can be forgiven—then deliver me;" but simply, "Deliver me." Nay, in a preceding part of this Psalm he says, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! verse 7." Whatever guilt, therefore, may lie upon the conscience of the vilest sinner under Heaven, let him go to God, and cry with humble confidence, "Deliver me, O God of my salvation!"

From this example of David, we may further learn,

II. The duty of all who have obtained mercy from the Lord.

"And my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness!"

The world is ready to complain, "Why do you not keep your religion to yourself?" But no pardoned sinner ought to do so; he is bound to render thanks for the mercies given unto him.

1. He owes it to God.

Surely God is to be honored, as a God of providence and a God of grace. Are we distinguished above the brute creation? We should bless God for the faculties bestowed upon us. Are we elevated above any of our fellows by the communication of spiritual blessings to our souls? We are bound to praise God for such "an unspeakable gift." If we forbore to speak His praises, methinks "the very stones would cry out against us!"

2. He owes it to the world.

How is the world to be instructed in the knowledge of God, if those to whom that knowledge is imparted are silent respecting him? We owe a debt to them. "What our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life"—we are bound to declare to them. We are not at liberty to put our light under a bushel; but must "make it to shine before men, that they also may glorify our Father who is in Heaven." "When we are converted," we are bound in every possible way to "strengthen our brethren."

3. He owes it to himself.

Suppose a man to "have been forgiven much, will he not love much?" And will not love vent itself in the praise of the object beloved? Especially if a man has been made a partaker of God's righteousness; will he not sing aloud of that righteousness? No doubt he will; and, if the angelic hosts would account it a painful sacrifice if silence were imposed upon them, and they were forbidden to show forth the praises of their God—so would it be with the believing soul, in proportion to the measure of grace that had been conferred upon him.

To all, then, I say,

1. Be particular in your applications to God for saving mercy.

Do not rest in mere general confessions or general petitions; but search out the hidden iniquities of your hearts, and spread them distinctly before God in prayer. We have not all committed the sins of David—but are we not all sinners? And if we would search the records of our conscience, might we not find some evils which call for more than ordinary humiliation? Or, if in acts we have been free from any remarkable transgression, have we not felt such motions of sin within us, as might, if God had given us up to temptation, have issued in the foulest transgressions? We need only recollect what our Lord tells us, that an impure and angry thought is heart adultery and murder; and we shall see little reason to cast a stone at others, and abundant reason for humiliation before God. I say, then, search out, every one of you—your besetting sins; and implore of God the forgiveness of them.

2. Have respect to God under his proper character.

View God not merely as your Creator, your Governor, and your Judge—but as your Covenant God and Savior. See how David addresses him, "O God—God of my salvation!" Thus it will be well for every sinner to do. See your own saving interest in him; see what provision he has made for you; what invitations he has given to you; what promises he has held forth to you. This will encourage penitence; this will strike the rock for penitential sorrows to flow out.

In a word, view God as he is in Christ Jesus—a God reconciling the world unto himself; and you will never indulge despair, nor ever doubt but He will show mercy to all who call upon him in spirit and in truth.

3. Determine, through grace, to improve for God the blessings you receive.

It was a suitable determination of David, that, if his requests should be granted, then "his tongue would sing aloud of God's righteousness." A similar resolution befits us. Are we savingly interested in a salvation which displays "the righteousness of God," and makes every perfection of his to concur in the promotion of our welfare? Let us not be silent; let us not be ashamed to confess him before men; though the whole world should endeavor to silence us, let us not regard them for one instant; but let us say with David, "I will praise you with music on the harp, because you are faithful to your promises, O my God. I will sing praises to you with a lyre, O Holy One of Israel. I will shout for joy and sing your praises, for you have ransomed me! [Psalm 71:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 71.22-24)."

#593

A BROKEN HEART THE BEST SACRIFICE

**[Psalm 51:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.16-17)**

"You do not desire sacrifice; else would I give it; you do not delight in burnt-offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise!"

"How shall I come before the Lord?" is the first inquiry that will be made by an awakened sinner. No sooner were the murderers of our Lord "pierced to the heart" with a conviction of their guilt, than they cried out, (the whole assembly of them together), "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

In answer to this, man proposes many costly offerings; and for the obtaining of peace with God, he would present unto Him anything that he should require, [Micah 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.6-7). Had God required sacrifices to be offered for David's sins, he would gladly have offered them, however numerous or costly they had been, "You do not desire sacrifice; else would I give it to you." But there is only one thing required, and that universally, of all people under Heaven; and what that is, we are informed in the words before us, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise!"

Here are two points to be inquired into:

I. What is that sacrifice which God approves.

The term "sacrifice" is metaphorically applied to many things:  
to praise and thanksgivings, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15);  
to alms-deeds, or charity, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16);  
to a surrender of the soul to God, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

But in our text it does not so much refer to any offerings whereby a pardoned sinner may honor God, as to that disposition of mind whereby an unpardoned sinner may facilitate his acceptance with God.

As to any external services, David informs us that these would not answer the desired end; for though many offerings under the law were appointed and approved by God as typical of the great sacrifice—yet were they in themselves of no value, [Psalm 50:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.8-14), especially when compared with obedience, [1 Samuel 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.22). [Hosea 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.6); and, when substituted for obedience, they were hateful and abominable in the sight of God, [Isaiah 1:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-15); [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3) and [Amos 5:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.21-23).

For such sins as David's willful adultery and murder, there was actually no sacrifice appointed; no penalty less than death could be awarded to the person that was found guilty either of adultery or murder, [Numbers 35:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 35.31) [Deuteronomy 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 22.22). But there is a sacrifice which will forward the acceptance even of such an atrocious sinner as David; it is called in our text, "A broken and contrite heart." To ascertain what is meant by this, let us consider,

1. The **term**: "A broken and contrite heart."

We all have some idea of what is meant by "a broken heart," when applied to worldly sorrow. It signifies a person overwhelmed with sorrow to such a degree, that he is always bowed down under its weight, and incapable of receiving consolation from anything but the actual removal of his burdens. Thus far it may serve to illustrate the meaning of our text, and to show what is meant by a heart broken with a sense of sin.

But in other respects there is an exceeding great difference between the two; for a heart broken with worldly troubles, argues:  
an ignorance of our own demerit,  
a lack of resignation to God,  
a lack of trust in him,  
and a low esteem of those benefits which sanctified affliction is calculated to produce.

In these respects therefore, it forms a contrast, rather than a resemblance, to true contrition.

Let us then drop the term, and consider the thing.

2. The **thing itself**: "A broken and contrite heart."

"A broken and a contrite heart" consists in:  
a deep sense of our sinfulness, guilt, and misery;  
a self-loathing and abhorrence on account of the peculiar aggravations of our sin, as committed against such a gracious God and a merciful Redeemer;  
a readiness to justify God in all His dealings with us, whatever they may be;  
and such an insatiable desire after saving mercy, as swallows up every other sensation, whether of joy or sorrow.

View all these things distinctly and separately; compare them with the workings of David's mind as set forth in this Psalm verses 3, 4, 7-9; view them as illustrated by other portions of Holy Writ, [2 Chronicles 34:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 34.27). [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6) with [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10). [Luke 15:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.18-19). 2 Chronicles 33:12-13, or all together. [2 Corinthians 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.11). or as exemplified in other of David's Psalms, [Psalm 38:4-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.4-10); [Psalm 40:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.12).

Perhaps it will be best to confine the illustrations to Psalms 51 and 38 for fear of swelling this part of the subject too much; and the more they are considered, the more will they reveal to us the precise nature of that sacrifice which is described in the text.

Let us now proceed to inquire,

II. Why God honors a broken and contrite heart with his peculiar favor.

That God does signally honor it, is certain.

When it is said that "a broken and contrite heart God will not despise," more is meant than is expressed. It means that God will honor it with tokens of his peculiar approbation. Whoever he is that offers to him this sacrifice—God will notice him, even though he were the lowest and vilest of mankind. Not all the angels in Heaven should so occupy his attention as to prevent him from searching out that person, and keeping his eye continually fixed upon him for good! [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2).

Moreover, God will comfort him; he will not merely view him from Heaven, but will come down and dwell in his heart on purpose to comfort and revive him, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15);

Nor is this all; for God will surely and eternally save him, [Psalm 34:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.18). [Job 33:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.27-28); and the more abased the man is in his own eyes—the higher will God exalt him on a throne of glory, [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.14).

And the reasons of his so honoring it are plain.

A broken and a contrite heart is the work of his own Spirit on the soul of man. No created power can effect it; we may break and bruise the body, but we can never produce in anyone a broken and contrite spirit. This is God's prerogative, [Job 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.11). [Ezekiel 11:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.19); and whoever has obtained this blessing must say, "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose, [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5)."

A broken and a contrite heart is the precise disposition that befits us. If the holy angels that never sinned veil their faces and their feet in the presence of their God—the what prostration of mind must become such guilty creatures as we are! Surely we must "put our hands on our mouth, and our mouth in the dust, crying, Unclean! Unclean! [Lamentations 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.29) with [Leviticus 13:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.45)." Yes rather, we should "gird ourselves with sackcloth, and wallow in ashes, and make mourning as for an only son, even most bitter lamentation, [Jeremiah 6:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.26) with [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.9-10)."

Further, A broken and a contrite heart disposes us to acquiesce cordially in Gods' appointed method of salvation. Until we are thoroughly broken-hearted with a sense of sin, we never estimate aright the unspeakable blessings of Redemption. "We may profess a regard for the Gospel; but we do not really "glory in the cross of Christ;" Christ does not truly become "all our salvation and all our desire."

But to the truly contrite, O how precious is the name of Jesus, that adorable name, the foundation of all our hopes, the source of all our joys!

Lastly, A broken and a contrite heart invariably stimulates us to a cheerful unreserved obedience. No commandment is hard to a person, when once his heart is truly broken and contrite! Let us see that we were dead in sin, and that Christ died for us; and a sense of "his love will constrain us to live to him," and to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his."

Say now, whether here is not reason sufficient for the distinguished favors which God grants to the contrite soul? We know that there is nothing meritorious in contrition; but there is in it a suitableness for the reception of the divine mercies, and for the reflecting back upon God the honor which he confers upon it.

This subject may well be **improved**,

1. For the **conviction of the impenitent**.

Worldly sorrow has more or less been the portion of us all; but how few have "sorrowed after a godly sort!" The generality have never laid to heart their sins at all; and they who have felt some compunction, have for the most part been satisfied with a little transient sorrow, and something of an outward reformation of life. But let this be remembered, that when it is said, "God will not despise the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart," it is manifestly implied, that he will despise everything short of that.

Do not then deceive yourselves with an expectation that God will accept your feigned or partial humiliation; your penitence must be deep, and your change radical; your sorrow for sin must far exceed any worldly sorrow, and must bring you incessantly to the foot of the cross, as your only refuge and your only hope! Nor will any repentance short of this be "a repentance unto salvation, but only a repentance eternally to be repented of! [2 Corinthians 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10)."

2. For **consolation to the penitent**.

When once you become truly penitent, men will begin to despise you; they will look upon you as a poor weak enthusiast, and will "cast out your name as evil." But your comfort is, that God will not despise you. If the Psalmist had merely affirmed this, it would have been a rich ground of consolation; but he makes it a matter of appeal to God, "A broken and contrite spirit, O God, you will not despise." What a glorious truth! When you are so vile and contemptible in your own eyes that you blush and are confounded before God, and "dare not even lift up your eyes unto Heaven," God looks upon you with pleasure and delight, and acknowledges you as his dearly beloved child! [Jeremiah 31:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18-20).

Do you want evidence of this? See for whom God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3); and read the account given of the very first sermon that Jesus ever preached, [Luke 4:17-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.17-21); and hear to whom in particular he addressed his invitations in [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28). Consider these, I say, and then reject the consolation if you can.

3. For **instruction to the more advanced Christian**.

Is a broken and contrite heart the sacrifice with which you must come to God? Know that it is that which you must continue also to offer him to the last hour of your lives. You are not to lose the remembrance of your shame and sorrow, but to "loath yourselves after God is pacified towards you," [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63), and because that God is pacified towards you.

The more abundant is his mercy towards you—the more should you abhor yourself for having ever sinned against so gracious a God!

You cannot but have seen in others, and probably felt within yourselves, a disposition to depart from this ground, and to indulge a spirit of self-sufficiency and pride. I entreat you to examine yourselves with respect to this. It is a common evil, and is very apt to lurk in us unperceived.

But if we see it not ourselves, we shall without fail reveal it to others; or, if they should not discover it, God will behold it, and that too with utter abhorrence! [Proverbs 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.5) and [1 Peter 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.5). Watch over yourselves therefore, and pray that you may grow continually in lowliness of mind, in tenderness of conscience, in meekness of temper, and in purity of heart. The more you resemble little children—the higher will you be in the kingdom of God! [Matthew 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.4)

#594

THE AFFLICTED SOUL COMFORTED

**[Psalm 55:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.6)**

"O that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest!"

Trouble is the portion of all, without exception; of the rich, as well as of the poor; of the godly, as well as of the ungodly, "man is born to it, as the sparks fly upward." The godly indeed have, in some respects, a larger measure of it than others; for, from within, they have grounds of trouble which are unknown to others; and, from without, they are beset on every side with enemies, who hate them purely for their righteousness' sake. Among all the saints of whom we read in Scripture, David seems to have been peculiarly distinguished as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." In the early part of his life, his persecutions from Saul kept him in continual jeopardy of his life; and during all his latter years, his own children furnished him with occasions of sorrow, which at times sunk him into the deepest distress, and rendered him weary even of life. The Psalm before us was written on one of these occasions; we suppose at the time of Absalom's rebellion. And so greatly was he oppressed in spirit, that he would gladly have fled to the ends of the earth, with the loss of all his honors and dignities, if he could but have obtained rest from his accumulated and overwhelming afflictions; he said, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

This being by no means an uncommon sentiment, I will show,

I. What are the occasions which usually give rise to this wish.

The wish itself necessarily presupposes a state of trouble; and it may arise in the bosom,

1. From temporal troubles.

Afflictions do not lose their nature when they visit the godly. Piety may soften their pungency; but it does not divest them of their proper qualities, "they are not joyous to any, but grievous;" as God has condescended to declare. How grievous David's trial was, may be seen in all the preceding context, "Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not yourself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me! I mourn in my distress and make a noise; my heart is sore pained within me; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fear-fullness and trembling are come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me." Nor do we wonder at this language, when we consider that his own son had driven him from his throne; that many of his subjects were in rebellion against him; and that there was about to be a conflict between two portions of them, the one headed by himself, and the other led on by his son; and that, whichever might be victorious, it must be the blood of his subjects only that must flow. Well might he wish to withdraw from such a distressing scene, and well might he express himself in those mournful terms, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the stormy wind and tempest." And though such scenes are rare, it is by no means uncommon to find in families troubles of such an overwhelming nature, as to make life itself a burden to those who are afflicted by them. Husbands and wives, parents and children, who ought to be sources of the sublimest happiness to each other, are frequently occasions to each other of the deepest woe; a woe that embitters their whole lives, and makes them pant for death as a relief. And where there is no particular evil committed either by the head or members, there will often arise, from the dispensations of Providence, such afflictions as prove an insupportable burden to the mind. In Job, for instance, we see, from his accumulated trials, the same effect produced as from the afflictions of David. He wished that in his early infancy he had been consigned to the grave, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest." "Why," says he, "is light given to him who is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; who long for death, but it comes not; and dig for it more than for hidden treasures? There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master [Job 3:17-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 3.17-21)." In truth, almost all the suicides of which we hear originate in worldly sorrow, either personal or domestic; nor is it always found that piety itself is sufficient to counterbalance the effects of temporal calamity; so as to elevate the spirits which have been broken by it, and restore the constitution that has been destroyed.

2. From spiritual troubles.

Of these, none can judge, but those who have endured them. In reference to these it may well be said, "The spirit of man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear [Proverbs 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.14)." Truly, when a man is bowed down under a sense of sin, and trembling under apprehensions of God's wrath, he may well be dejected, and wish for anything which may pacify his fears and terminate his sorrows. Great as Job's other troubles were, this was heavier than them all. Hear his complaint under it, "O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! for now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. O that I might have my request! that God would grant me the thing that I long for, even that it would please God to destroy me [Job 6:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.2-4); [Job 6:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.8-9), Terrible, beyond measure, are the hidings of God's face under such circumstances; so at least David felt them to be, "You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps; your wrath lies hard upon me, and you have afflicted me with all your waves. Lord, why cast you off my soul? why hide you your face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer your terrors, I am distracted [Psalm 88:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.7-8); [Psalm 88:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14-15)." So it is with some at this time; they go mourning all the day long; and by their anticipations of God's wrath, feel almost the commencement of it in their souls. The Savior himself deprecated this bitter cup, and complained of the hidings of God's face in his extremity; well, therefore, may frail men. who are crushed before the moth, implore "the staying of God's rough wind in the day of his east wind. [Isaiah 27:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.8)."

Seeing, then, that the wish of David is common in the world, let us inquire,

II. How far the godly are at liberty to indulge it.

Certainly we are at liberty to wish for death; for Paul "desired to depart, and to be with Christ," which he deemed far better than the happiest state on earth; and we all are encouraged to be "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of Christ." But the wish then becomes evil, when it is attended with impatience, or has respect to a mere deliverance from present troubles. This distinction is clearly marked by Paul, in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life [2 Corinthians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.4)." It was not so much to get rid of the storms and tempests to which he was exposed in this present life, as to obtain the glory and felicity of the eternal world. And this was a highly commendable state of mind. But when we long merely to be released from the troubles of life, and the conflicts which we are here called to sustain, we do not well; for we should be content,

1. That God should glorify himself in his own way.

God sends trials to his people, in order that he may afford them such effectual support as shall advance his glory in the world. The trial of gold by fire is precious, because it purifies without consuming the gold; but "the trial of our faith is infinitely more precious," because it purifies the souls of men; and it will, therefore, "be to the praise and honor and glory of our God, in the great day of his appearing 1 Peter 1:7." On the part of those who occasion trials to his people he is dishonored, "but in the steadfastness of his people he is glorified 1 Peter 4:14." Even in the sufferings of our blessed Lord this end was obtained; and therefore, though he deprecated sufferings as he was entitled to do, he submitted to bear his cross for the sake of reflecting glory on his heavenly Father, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify your name [John 12:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27-28)." Thus, if only in the event God may be glorified in us, we should be willing to bear any sufferings, or sustain any conflicts, which God, in his wisdom, may see fit to lay upon us.

2. That he should complete his work in his own way.

He calls all his people to bear their cross, in imitation, of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Now "the Lord Jesus, though he was a Son, vet learned obedience by the things which he suffered;" and "he was made perfect through sufferings;" and in the same war does God still teach and perfect us. He makes tribulation the way to glory; purging us from our corruptions by means of it [Isaiah 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.9). [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10), and causing it to "work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17)." Does it befit us, then, to be impatient under our troubles; or to wish for the removal of them, before they have accomplished the end for which they were sent? Surely we should be infinitely more anxious to have them sanctified, than to get them removed; and, however sorely they may press upon us, we should say, "Not my will, but your be done." Be the furnace never so hot, we should welcome it, if only at last we may come out of it "vessels of honor, fit for the Master's use."

**ADDRESS.**

1. Those who have hitherto been exempt from heavy trials.

Doubtless, as far as the mere exemption from trouble goes, you have reason to be thankful; but yet. if for lack of it you are yet in a careless or lukewarm state, you have no great reason to congratulate yourselves; It would have been better that every bone in your body were broken, or that you should have the sword of the Almighty inflicting the deepest wounds in your souls, than that you should be left to go on wickedly in the way of your hearts, I do not say that you should pray for trials; for trials will do you no good, if they be not sanctified to your souls by the Spirit of God. But this I say, Let no rest satisfy you, except that which is to be found in the favor of a reconciled God, and in the hope of his glory.

2. Those who are sinking under the weight of them.

Perhaps some may be here, who, like David, are bowed down under the weight of domestic troubles, or under a dread of God's heavy displeasure. And, if this be the case, let me tell you where you may find rest unto your souls, You need not the wings of a dove to fly away; you have your refuge close at hand, even Jesus, who says, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If you will but run to Him, you shall find him "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2)." Yes, m truth, "He is a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.4)." Go to him then; take refuge in him; cast yourselves upon him; and let him give you rest, in his own time and way. Then will he walk with you in the furnace, as he did with the Hebrew youths; and in due season add you to the happy number of "those who have come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14)." Then will your rest be glorious indeed; for "then you will hunger no more, nor thirst any more; neither shall the sun rest on you, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed you, and shall lead you unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes [Revelation 7:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.16-17)."

#595

VOWS TO BE PERFORMED

**[Psalm 56:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.12)**

"I am under vows to you, O God; I will present my thank offerings to you!"

[Editor's note: It appears that this particular sermon was given during a special "Confirmation Service" where a Bishop officially "confirms" those who were baptized in their infancy. Please click **[here](https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/confirmations/confirmation-faqs" \l ":~:text=Confirmation is a special church,these promises on your behalf.)** for further information from the Church of England.]

We find Simeon's views on "infant baptism," "confirmation" etc., expressed below, to be for the most part, fanciful, confusing, and unbiblical—and at times abhorrent to the Christian gospel.]

Vows were encouraged under the Mosaic Law, [Numbers 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.2); [Numbers 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.5); [Numbers 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.21); and many particular rules were given in relation to them, [Numbers 30:2-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 30.2-15). Nor are they altogether discouraged under the Christian dispensation. On the contrary, they are spoken of by the prophets as no less adapted to our state, than they were to the state of the Jews under the Mosaic economy, [Isaiah 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 19.21) and [Nahum 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Nah 1.15). Where vows relate to any particular act which is not otherwise required of us, I confess I think them not very advisable. They are for the most part calculated rather to ensnare than to edify the soul, [Proverbs 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.25). But, where they are only a more solemn way of binding ourselves to the performance of acknowledged duties, they are as useful to ourselves, and as pleasing to God as ever.

The particular ordinance which has recently been administered among us will lead me to show you,

I. What vows are upon you.

There are vows of a more particular nature, which may have been secretly made by different individuals; which are more fit for our own personal consideration before God than for any notice on a public occasion like this; and the rather because the points that would be interesting to one or two might excite no interest in the minds of the generality among us. But there are vows common to us all; for instance, those made by us,

1. At our **baptism**.

When presented at the sacred font, we were, as the Scripture expresses it, "baptized into Christ, [Galatians 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.27)." As the Israelites, in their passage through the sea, were "baptized unto Moses," while, with a wall of water on their right hand and on their left, they were sprinkled with the surge, and consecrated, as it were, unto the Lord, to embrace the revelation which was then made known to them, and to obey the laws which were then delivered them, [1 Corinthians 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-2); so we, in our baptism, profess to regard the Lord Jesus Christ as our mighty deliverer, and to obey him as our only Lord.

As it was not uncommon in the Apostolic age to baptize also by immersion, Paul represents it as being "buried with Christ in baptism into his death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, [Romans 6:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.3-4)."

In both of these views, we see clearly what our vows have been; to believe in Christ, to follow Christ, dying unto sin as he died for it, and rising to a new and heavenly life, as he on the third day after his crucifixion rose to a life of blessedness and glory at the right hand of God. This was renewed,

2. At our **confirmation**.

As at twelve years of age the Jewish children were presented at the temple, that they might come more fully under the yoke of their Law; so among us, at a somewhat later age, young people are called upon to present themselves unto the Lord, and to take upon themselves those engagements which were made for them at their baptism by their sponsors. You well know what the things are which were then promised in your name:  
first, "that you should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh;  
next, that you should believe all the articles of the Christian faith;  
and, lastly, that you should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life."

Now, in reference to these very engagements, it was distinctly asked of you by the Bishop, "Do you here, in the presence of God and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you?" And then "every one of you audibly and distinctly answered, I do." Remember, then, that all these vows are upon you. They are not to be regarded as empty words, which might, at the close of the ceremony, be forgotten. No, indeed; by them your souls are bound; and every one who does not labor to carry them into effect, contracts the heaviest guilt; his whole life being one continued act of lying unto God.

3. At the **table of the Lord**.

Those of us who have attained to fuller age have, for the most part, been frequent communicants at the Lord's supper; as it is to be hoped that many of you, my young friends, will before long be; for I must say to you, that your confirmation is intended to be a preparation for that holy ordinance; and is of no real utility to you, if it is not followed up by a total surrender of yourselves to God at the table of your Lord.

Now, at the Lord's table we give up ourselves wholly to the Lord. The word "sacrament," by which that ordinance is often designated, refers to the oath which the Roman soldiers took to be faithful to their General; such an oath we all take, as it were, when we eat the body, and drink the blood, of our Lord and Savior at his table. We engage to be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and never to forsake his standard, but to be faithful unto him even unto death.

The difference between our engagements at the three different periods is this;  
at our baptism the promises were made for us by our sponsors;  
at our confirmation we took upon ourselves all that had been engaged in our behalf;  
and at the Lord's table we carry it all, as it were, into effect; and, by an open recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and our Lord. We declare before all, that we are determined, through grace, to live and die in his sacred cause; having no hope but in his atoning blood; no strength but in his grace; no rule but his revealed will; no end of life but the glory of his name.

Such being the vows of God that are upon us, let us consider,

II. The obligations thereby entailed upon us.

These vows are to be performed; for "It would have been better never to vow at all, than to vow and not pay, [Ecclesiastes 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.4-5)."

The least that we can do is, "to render thank offerings to the Lord;" and this we should do,

1. In a way of devout acknowledgment.

This was the way in which David performed his vows, "I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you—vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats, [Psalm 66:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.13-15)."

This was fitted to the dispensation under which he lived; but under the Christian dispensation nothing of this kind is required; the sacrifice of a grateful heart is that which alone will prove acceptable to our God. For so it is said, "Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, [Psalm 50:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.13-14)." And say, whether there be not abundant ground for praise and thanksgiving? That you were ever dedicated to the Lord in baptism, have you not reason to be thankful for that? Think of the heathen world, who in their infancy are devoted only to some base idol, which, so far from being able to confer a benefit on them, is not capable of even protecting itself from being broken to pieces and cast into the fire. How much better is it to be consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him!"

Again, to have taken upon yourselves now all your baptismal vows, in order to the being confirmed and strengthened by Almighty God for the performance of them; what is this but to have set off already in your Christian course, and to be proceeding, as it were, in the high road to Heaven?

As for those who have been fed from time to time with the body and blood of Christ, and have been thereby established, strengthened, settled in the ways of God, methinks "the very stones would cry out against them," if they did not sing and shout aloud for joy. To all of you, then, I recommend the adoption of David's purpose, and of Davids words, "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD—in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD! [Psalm 116:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12-14); [Psalm 116:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.17-19)."

2. In away of total surrender of yourselves to God.

This, beyond a doubt, is the true object of all our vows; and without this no transient purposes or emotions will be of any value. And this is what Paul most earnestly recommends, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." In presenting voluntary oblations to the Lord, there were some peculiar encouragements afforded, to which I will call your more especial attention.

First, of the offerings so presented, the offerers themselves partook; so that Almighty God, who was represented by the altar that consumed the memorial; and the priests, to whose support a good measure of the offering was assigned; and the offerer himself; all, if I may so speak, feasted together.

Next, the vow or voluntary offering might be presented "with leavened bread;" yes, notwithstanding leaven was prohibited, most strictly prohibited, in all other offerings—it might be presented in this, because God would show his special approbation of this, and his willingness to condescend to the infirmities of those who desired to honor him, though they could not honor him to the extent they desired.

And, lastly, whereas in an offering of thanksgiving the offerer could only partake on the day that he presented his offering, in that which he presented as a vow, he might partake the second day, as well as the first; so that he might have a full, a rich, an abiding enjoyment of the sacrifice, which, of his own free will, and without any necessity imposed upon him, he had vowed unto the Lord. See [Leviticus 7:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.11-16). Mark the distinction between verse 12 and verse 16.

And now, after this, shall I need to multiply words in order to induce you, brethren, to surrender up yourselves unto the Lord? No; I need only show you in what way God has prescribed it to be done under the very dispensation under which we live, "In those days, at that time," declares the LORD, "the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God. They will ask the way to Zion and turn their faces toward it. They will come and bind themselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten, [Jeremiah 50:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.4-5)."

Do this, my beloved, and it will be the best possible completion of your vows. Go to God, as not your own, but His; go to him as bought with a price, even with the precious blood of his only dear Son; and from this moment live wholly unto him, that you may "glorify him in your body, and in your spirit, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20)."

#596

DAVID'S LOVE TO GOD

**[Psalm 57:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.7-11)**

"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth!"

Here we behold the bosom of a saint laid open, and the inmost recesses of his heart exposed to view. We cannot read the words without being more or less impressed with this thought: O that my soul were in such a state as his! Indeed the Psalmist himself judged this record of his experience to be of more than ordinary importance to the Church; and therefore, at a subsequent period, he detached these words from the context in which they stand, and made them the commencement of a separate Psalm, Psalm 108; intimating thereby, that they were not only proper to be used on occasion of any great deliverance, like that which had just been given to him in the wilderness of Engedi, (where Saul had sought to destroy him, 1 Samuel 24,) but that our frame of mind at all times should be such as was there expressed.

Let us observe,

I. The grounds of David's love to God.

From the particular mercy which he had received, he was led to contemplate "God's wonderful perfections; and particularly to admire:

1. The extent of his mercy.

The temporal deliverance itself was a rich display of mercy, because it bespoke the watchful care of God over one, who, as a sinner, might rather have been an object of his displeasure. But David looked beyond the immediate occasion of his gratitude, and viewed the mercy of God towards his soul. David knew himself to be a sinner, and that, if God should enter into judgment with him, he must inevitably and eternally perish. Nor should we be satisfied with approving ourselves to God in secret; we should honor him in the face of the whole world, and endeavor to prevail with all to unite with us in a duty so urgent, so reasonable, so delightful.

2. He begs of God also to exalt and glorify himself.

Sensible that, with all his efforts, he could affect but few, he entreats God to show forth his own glory, and, by augmented displays of it, to "Be exalted above the heavens." Thus to the same effect he addresses Jehovah in another Psalm, "Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds! [Psalm 45:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.3-4)."

In the 148th Psalm, his whole employment from beginning to end is to call on all the different creatures in Heaven and earth, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, to unite, according to their respective powers, in glorifying God!

Such then should be our prayer also. The manifestation of God's glory should be so dear to us, that we should have no wish, no thought, no desire in comparison with it.

ADDRESS.

That you may attain a greater measure of David's piety:

1. Study the divine character, as illustrated in **his dealings with you**.

To mark the dispensations of Providence and grace is good; but it will be of little service, unless we mark the attributes of God as displayed in his dealings with us. See, for instance, how multiplied your transgressions against him have been, and how wonderful has been his forbearance in not cutting you off in your sins, and making you monuments of his indignation, like the rebellious Israelites of old, or like Ananias and Sapphira in the Apostolic age!

Call to mind how ready he has been at all times to receive you to his favor; and, in answer to your prayers, to send you fresh supplies of grace, or mercy, or peace, according to your necessities.

Mark your various backslidings; and contrast with these the richness of his communications to you; and then say, "Who is a God like unto You, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy! [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18)."

The sense of God's excellency which you obtain from other sources will be speculative, superficial, and transient; but that which you derive from his dealings with you will be deep, practical, abiding!

2. Seek to have the dispositions of your minds suited to God's dispensations towards you.

What are the feelings which his mercy and truth should generate in your soul?

Should they not be those of admiration, and love, and gratitude, and trust?

Should they not be also those of holy zeal in his service?

Should they not be accompanied with a desire that the whole world should know him?

Here then you see precisely what should be the state of your mind from day to day. This is piety—this is genuine religion. Religion is not a matter of dispute, but of practice; and not of mere morals, but of spiritual feeling, similar to that which is expressed in my text, and venting itself in such language as this, "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion! [Psalm 103:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-4)."

This is your duty, shall I say? No; it is your privilege—and it is a very foretaste of Heaven! May God in his mercy diffuse among us this spirit more and more, and attune all our hearts to sing without ceasing the praises of our God!

#597

GOD'S BANNER OVER HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 60:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 60.4)**

"But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow. Selah"

[N.B. Banners were used as rallying points for troops in preparation for battle and for leading them into action.]

This Psalm, in the title of it, is called "Michtam," a golden Psalm; and it well deserves the name. It was written by David after he had come to the full possession of the kingdom, which, during the reign of Saul, 1 Samuel 31:7, and during the seven years' division of the tribes under Ishbosheth, [2 Samuel 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.4-5), had been reduced to a very low condition, "God had showed his people hard things, and made them to drink the wine of astonishment."

But the union of all Israel under David, and the victories they had already gained over their powerful and oppressive adversaries the Philistines, were tokens of God's returning favor to them, and a pledge to them that all his promised blessings should in due season be poured out upon them.

It would seem as if the more pious part of the people had been discouraged by the long continuance of this adversity; and had begun almost to despair of ever seeing their hopes realized, respecting the extension and stability of their national power. But David tells them, that, in his advancement to the kingdom, and in their recent successes, "God had given them a banner," and had unfurled it, as it were, before their eyes, as a signal of his presence in the midst of them, and as a pledge of victory over all their enemies.

What God did for the Jews as a pledge of temporal advancement, he has done for his redeemed people in all ages, to assure them of success in their spiritual warfare.

To illustrate this, I will show,

I. What banners God has given us.

The Church has a warfare to maintain; and, if, human prowess alone were considered, it is a warfare which would afford not the smallest prospect of success.

1. God has given to us a banner in **the elevation of his Son**.

David was an eminent type of Christ, and especially in the advancement of his kingdom; for Christ was appointed "to sit upon the throne of David forever and ever." Was David's elevation then a banner? Then so also is that of Christ, who is now seated at the right hand of God, above all the principalities and powers whether of earth or Hell. Believer, survey your Lord. Remember him in the manger, in the garden, on the cross, and in the grave. From a view of him in those scenes, you would be ready to say, There is no hope. But behold him risen, ascended, glorified, and in full possession of his kingdom; and then say, What a change awaits you after your present conflicts! [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20). His triumphs are a pledge of yours, "because he lives, you shall live also;" and "as he has overcome and has sat down with his Father upon his throne," so shall you, in your victories and in your triumphs, resemble him! [Luke 22:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29-30). [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

2. God has given to us a banner **in the records of his Word**.

Behold, what "a cloud of witnesses" present themselves to your view! Read the catalogue of worthies, as recorded by God himself. Are your trials heavier than theirs? [Hebrews 11:33-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.33-38). Or is the power that was sufficient for them withheld from you? Will not faith bring Omnipotence to your support, even as it did for them? They are set before you expressly for your encouragement, that you, seeing how they have succeeded, may be stirred up "to run your race with patience, looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of your faith," even as he was of their faith! [Hebrews 12:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1-2).

Are you weak? so were they.

Are your enemies numerous and mighty? So were theirs.

Did they prevail through the grace of Christ? That same "grace shall be sufficient for you;" for He is the same gracious and Almighty Friend as ever! Time has made no change in him, "his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear, [Isaiah 59:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.1);" as "he was mighty in them, so will he also be in you;" and "his strength shall be perfected in your weakness," even as it was in theirs! [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

3. God has given to us a banner in **the experience of his saints**.

You have found a divine change in your views, desires, pursuits. Tell me: Where has this change come from? Must you not say, "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose, [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5)." If you will look within, you will find that you have rather resisted this divine change than helped it forward. "Your carnal mind has been enmity against God;" and it would have been so still, if God, by the light of his Word, and the influences of his Spirit, had not subdued it to himself. If, then, the heart of stone has been taken away, and a heart of flesh been given to you—then that is itself "a banner" erected in your heart, a token of God's presence, a pledge of his power, and a pledge of yet richer mercies in reserve! For, "if it have pleased him to make you of the number of his people, he will not forsake you, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22);" and you may "be confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work within you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ! [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)."

Let us consider,

II. The **end** for which these divine banners are displayed unto us.

As the banner given to Israel in the time of David was to confirm their faith in his promises, and to assure them of God's faithfulness—so are the banners which God has given to us bestowed,

1. To confirm our **confidence** in him.

We ought to "know in whom we have believed," and to feel assured that he is both "able and willing to keep that which we have committed to him, 2 Timothy 1:12." We should never forget who it is that is engaged for us. We should never forget that in God we have:  
a wisdom that cannot be circumvented,  
a power that cannot be withstood,  
a faithfulness that is altogether inviolate and incapable of change.

What, then, have we to fear? The serpent, no doubt, is subtle, and the devices of Satan are very deep; but can he elude the eye of our heavenly Protector, or by any means defeat His purpose? Our enemies too, both within and without, are mighty; but what have we to fear, who have a Protector that is Almighty? "If God is for us—then who can be against us, [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)." Let our enemies be ever so numerous, we may safely affirm that "those who are with us, are more than those who are with them, [2 Kings 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.16-17);" and if we have no more than a lamp and a trumpet against an armed host—then we shall in Jehovah's name prevail against them all! [Judges 7:15-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.15-22). A stone out of the brook shall suffice us to destroy our mightiest adversary; yes, his own sword shall serve us for the instrument whereby to complete our triumph! [1 Samuel 17:49-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.49-51).

2. To assure us of **victory** over all our enemies.

Among men, a banner is only a signal to enlist them for the combat; but with God it is a pledge of victory. See how David regarded it, "In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: "Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne! [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4);" and, while he is there, you need not attempt to alarm me; I know my security, and defy the efforts of all my enemies.

It was this consideration that enabled Paul also to hurl defiance at his enemies, and to assure himself of victory, as much as if it had been already gained, [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39); And we also, in dependence on our God, may dismiss every fear, and anticipate, as already ours, the glory and felicity that await us! [2 Corinthians 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1-4). [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8).

APPLICATION.

What now can I say more but this:

1. **Fear** God.

"But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow! Selah"

You will observe, that this is the description of the people to whom his banner was given; and for them is the same privilege reserved in every age. Do not let any undervalue the fear of God; for, in truth, it is that which as assuredly interests us in the divine favor as love itself. Of course, it is a filial fear of which we speak; and he who possesses that, may divest himself of every other fear, "Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, or of the son of man, that shall be as grass, and forget the Lord your Maker! [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13)." Beloved brethren, "sanctify the Lord Almighty himself in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread! [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13)."

2. **Trust** in God.

Excellent was that resolution of the Psalmist, "In the name of our God, we will set up our banners, [Psalm 20:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 20.5)." It is not possible for our confidence to be too strong, provided only it is humble. There are, I confess, two different kinds of confidence, which yet I consider as dangerous in the extreme:

One of them is founded upon mere head-knowledge of divine truth, without any mixture of holy fear.

The other arises from some dream or vision, or enthusiastic conceit, about spiritual impressions coming to their mind in a peculiar way.

Against both of these I would guard you with all my might. The only confidence that is pleasing to God is that which is softened with fear, and tempered with contrition. Let this be in exercise to the utmost possible extent, and then you may adopt the language of this Psalm:

"Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered, [Psalm 60:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 60.5)."

"Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies! [Psalm 60:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 60.11-12)."

Only trust in God; and then, in every place where you go, you may behold an altar with this inscription, "Jehovah-Nissi, The Lord is my banner! [Exodus 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.15)." Yes, the very graces which you exercise, shall be in you a pledge that God will fulfill and perfect in you the good work he has begun!

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ADVICE TO THE AFFLICTED

**[Psalm 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 61.1-3)**

"Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you—I call when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe!"

In whatever situation we are, we shall find both consolation in the promises, and direction in the examples, that are recorded for our use in the Sacred Writings. But in seasons of affliction principally, will the holy Oracles be found precious, because they exhibit to us God's dearest children in similar circumstances, and point out to us the means which they, in their troubles, found effectual for their relief.

In recommending the example of David, we shall,

I. Mention some seasons wherein our hearts are apt to be overwhelmed.

This poor world is a valley of tears to all; but to some more especially:

1. From **temporal** calamities.

Bodily pains, loss of friends, failures, will weigh down the spirits even of the best, [2 Samuel 18:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 18.33)." And though, at times, religion will enable them to triumph in the midst of all their tribulations—yet its more common operation is:  
 to moderate their grief,  
 to produce resignation in their souls, and  
 to sanctify the affliction to their spiritual advancement.

2. From **spiritual** troubles.

The first convictions of penitents are often accompanied with the deepest anguish; insomuch that, if God did not support them by a hope of his mercy—then they might, like Judas, destroy themselves in utter despair. Their subsequent views also of their indwelling corruptions are frequently attended with such dejection, as quite to enervate the body and overwhelm the soul! [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4). [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24). If to these are added the hidings of God's face, the soul may have a foretaste even of Hell itself in the miseries that it endures! [Psalm 77:2-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.2-9).

3. From the near prospect of **death**.

To a true believer enjoying the divine presence, death has no terrors, [Philippians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.21); [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23); it is a welcome messenger, that cannot come too soon. But to one in spiritual darkness and desertion, death is inexpressibly dreadful; and the whole world would appear but a small price to pay for the respite of a few days.

The ungodly often die as insensible of eternal realities as the beasts! But the godly, who know the terrors of the Lord, cannot pass through that dreary valley without extreme horror, unless they have an inward witness of their acceptance with God, [Psalm 55:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.4-5).

The example in the text may serve as a model, while we endeavor to,

II. Show how we should conduct ourselves in those seasons when our hearts are apt to be overwhelmed.

1. To speak generally, we should betake ourselves to prayer.

God is the only source of true strength and consolation. If we apply to the creature in our distress, we shall invariably find him but a broken reed! [Hosea 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.14). [Isaiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.3). On the contrary, the pressure that is on our minds will, for the most part, increase; or, if the trouble is removed, the removal will prove a heavier judgment than its continuance.

But if we apply with humility to the throne of grace, the desired effect will almost instantly appear, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24). There is no trouble from which prayer has not extricated believers!

Prayer prolonged the life of Hezekiah, [2 Kings 20:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.1-6).

Prayer brought Jonah from the bottom of the sea, [Jonah 2:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.1-7).

Prayer restored to peace the tempest-tossed soul of David, [Psalm 116:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.3-8).

For us also, if it is fervent, prayer shall effectually prevail, [James 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16).

There is no disquietude which prayer shall not pacify.

There is no sorrow which prayer shall not turn into songs of joy! [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.15).

Wherever we are therefore, even "at the very ends of the earth," and however circumstanced—we should make our requests known unto God, in order to the attainment of solid peace, [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7).

2. More particularly, we should beg of God to lead us to the Savior.

David, though a king, had no sufficiency in himself; he was forced to look to one higher than himself, even to Jesus, the Rock of his salvation! [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19). But how should he come to Jesus, unless the Father should draw him? [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44). Hence he prayed so fervently, that God would "lead" him to that Rock.

There then must we also go; for there alone can we find stability.

Does guilt appal us? Nothing but the blood of Jesus can compose our minds! [Acts 16:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.29-31).

Do temptations harass us? Nothing but his grace can enable us to withstand them! [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

Do accumulated troubles threaten to overwhelm us? We can both do and suffer all things, if he strengthens us—yes, we shall be more than conquerors through him who loved us! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37). Like a shipwrecked mariner standing on a rock, we may defy the waves that roar beneath our feet. Such was the experience of David himself [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3)," and such shall be ours also, if the storms that threaten us drive us for security to that place of safety.

Let us then, in every affliction, look to Jesus as our help; and, with a deep impression of our inability to go to him aright, let us cry unto God, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!"

ADDRESS.

1. Those who experience no overwhelming troubles.

However serene the sky at present is, no man knows how soon a storm may arise. But supposing our voyage through life is ever so favorable, it must come to an end; and what shall we do in the hour of death without a saving interest in Christ? Above all, what must become of us, if we are not fixed upon that Rock at the day of judgment?

Let us then improve our tranquil hours in securing a saving foundation on Christ Jesus; that, however suddenly calamities may come, or death may summon us into the presence of our God, we may be found standing immovably on the Rock of ages! Then, like Noah, shall we rejoice in God's favor, when thoughtless myriads shall be overwhelmed in the deluge of his wrath!

2. Those who are bowed down under trouble.

You are but too apt to carry your distresses to men, instead of spreading them before God. What wonder then, that you find no deliverance? Has not David told you, that this was his very experience; and that nothing but the use of this remedy afforded him relief? [Psalm 32:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.3-5).

Chide then, and resist, your backwardness to prayer. Lay the blame, not on God, who is willing to impart help, but on yourselves, who are unwilling to implore it. Your troubles are sent on purpose to drive you to the Savior, whom, in a time of prosperity, you are too prone to neglect! If they produce that effect, you shall soon number your trials among your richest blessings!

#599

GOD OUR ONLY AND ALL-SUFFICIENT HELP

**[Psalm 62:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.5-8)**

"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Selah"

There is scarcely anything that more offends the ignorant and ungodly, than a profession of maintaining fellowship with Jehovah, and of receiving from him certain communications which are unknown to the world at large. Such pretensions are considered by them as the offspring of spiritual pride and incurable presumption. But it will scarcely be supposed that the Gospel has reduced us to a lower state than was enjoyed under the law, or deprived us of privileges that were possessed under that less perfect dispensation; yet behold, with what intimate access to God the Psalmist was favored, and what communion with him he teaches every contrite sinner to expect!

It is worthy of observation, that in this Psalm there is not one single petition or thanksgiving; the whole of it is occupied in stating what comfort he found in God, and in encouraging others to expect the same. Especially in the words which we have just read, we see,

I. David's happy experience.

Great and manifold were David's trials, from his earliest youth even to his dying hour. But "in all he encouraged himself in the Lord his God:"

David waited upon God as his all-sufficient help.

The Psalm begins with affirming this; and, in our text, David encourages his soul to persevere in this blessed course, "My soul, wait only upon God."

As for men, he found that they could not be relied upon; both rich and poor were alike but a broken reed, "a lie and vanity, verse 9."

Nor could power or wealth afford any better ground of confidence, verse 10.

God alone has the power requisite for supplying the needs of his creatures, verse 11; and therefore "from God alone was all his expectation, verse 5." To him he looked in all his troubles, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. When persecuted by Saul, he fled to his invisible Protector, and took refuge under the shadow of Jehovah's wings. In like manner, when assaulted by Satan, his great spiritual adversary, "he got him to his Lord right humbly," and sought in him that salvation which He alone can give. Under all circumstances he considered God as able, willing, yes and pledged too, to deliver him; and to him he ran, as to a strong tower, in which he found unfailing security. As to the time and manner of his deliverance—David left that entirely to God.

He found in God all that his diversified necessities required.

He was never disappointed of his hope. The many miraculous escapes which he experienced, testify that God was ever near at hand to help him; and the peace and stability which he obtained in his soul after his most grievous fall, manifestly prove how exceedingly the grace of God was magnified towards him. We wonder not at his frequent repetition of the same acknowledgments, verse 1, 2 with the text, or at the augmented confidence with which he was enabled to look forward to a continuance of the Divine favor even unto death. Compare verse 2, with verse 6. "Not greatly moved;" "Not moved at all."

But from this experience he was fully qualified to give:

II. David's advice founded upon it.

To wait on God is the duty of every living creature, and especially of those who are instructed in the knowledge of his revealed will. "He is the one source of every good and perfect gift."

1. David advises us to wait upon God in a way of **earnest prayer**.

We should not merely call upon God, but "pour out our hearts before him." If our troubles are of a more public nature, we should, like Hezekiah, spread our needs before him, [2 Kings 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 19.14). Or, if they are known to ourselves alone, we should, like Hannah, carry them to the Lord. [1 Samuel 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.15).

The direction given us by God himself is, that "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we should make our requests known unto God, [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6)." We should not say of one thing: It is too great for me to ask; or of another thing, It is too small for me to ask. We should remember, that "he will be inquired of by us," before he will communicate to us his promised blessings, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37); and, if we ask in faith, he will "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we either ask or think."

2. David advises us to wait upon God in a way of **confident expectation**.

We should "not stagger at any of God's promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." If he sees fit to delay his answer, we must not be discouraged, but wait his time; assured, that "the vision shall not tarry" beyond the precise moment that he sees to be best for us, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3). We must trust him no less when we see no way for our deliverance, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10). [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16), than when the promised relief is visibly at hand.

Under all the endearing characters which are assigned to him in our text, we should expect his gracious interposition. If our difficulties and trials are of a temporal nature, we should anticipate with confidence his effectual aid, [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9); and if of a spiritual nature, we should feel assured, that none shall finally prevail against us, [Jeremiah 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.19). We should confidently say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are laboring under **temporal**affliction.

Those who have no God to go to, often sink under their troubles, and frequently seek refuge from them in suicide. Do not be like them. There is a God, whose is the earth, and the fullness thereof, and who feeds even the ravens that call upon him. Your trials are intended to lead you to him; and if they have this effect, you shall have cause to bless him for them to all eternity! Only remember to not lean to the creature for support. Seek everything in God; in "God alone;" in "God at all times;" and you shall not be disappointed of your hope.

2. To those who are bowed down with **spiritual**trouble.

Hear what instruction the Prophet Jeremiah gives to people in your state, [Lamentations 3:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.25-29). David would have sunk under his troubles, if he had not cast his care entirely upon the Lord, [Psalm 27:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.13-14). Follow then his example in this particular; charge it upon yourself to do so, "My soul, wait only upon God." And if still distressing fears oppress you, chide your unbelieving soul as he did, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my confidence and my God! [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)."

#600

THE BELIEVER'S DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS GOD

**[Psalm 63:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-8)**

"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me!"

It is justly said of God, that "he gives songs in the night;" and never was there a more striking evidence of it than in the psalm before us. David is supposed to have written it when he was in the wilderness of Ziph, fleeing from Saul who was seeking to destroy him [1 Samuel 23:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.15). But we can scarcely conceive that he would call himself "the king," as he does in the 11th verse, in the life-time of Saul; for though he believed that God would ultimately raise him to the throne, it would have been treason against his legitimate prince to arrogate to himself the title of "king;" nor can we conceive that under his perilous circumstances he would have given Saul so just a ground of accusation against him.

For these reasons we are inclined to think it was written at the time that he fled into the wilderness from Absalom, when he, and the people that were with him, were in the greatest distress for every necessity of life, [2 Samuel 17:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 17.28-29). But what are the contents of this Psalm? Nothing but joy and triumph; the things of time and sense were as nothing in his eyes; but God was "all in all."

From that portion of the Psalm which we have read, we shall take occasion to show you:  
the desires of a renewed soul,  
the purposes of a renewed soul, and  
the expectations of a renewed soul.

I. The **desires** of a renewed soul.

As soon as the soul has obtained a saving interest in Christ, and reconciliation with God through him, it is privileged to claim God as its own special portion; it is entitled to say of Christ, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his;" "He has loved me, and given himself for me!" And to the Father himself also, as now reconciled to him, he can say, "O God, you are my God!" It is no wonder then, that from henceforth God becomes the one object of his desire.

The soul now finds no satisfaction in earthly things.

The whole world appears to it as "a land where there is no water." The whole creation seems to be but "a broken cistern," which, while it promises refreshment to the weary and heavy-laden, is never able to impart it.

If it is objected, that, though David, under his peculiar trials, found the world so barren of all good—but we may find it a source of comfort to us; we answer, That there is nothing in this world that is suited to satisfy the desires of an immortal soul; and that, the more we have of this world, the more fully shall we be convinced, that it is altogether an empty bubble, a cheat, a lie; and that "vanity and vexation of spirit" is written by the finger of God himself upon all that it contains. The carnal mind cannot believe this; but the renewed soul needs no argument to convince it of this truth.

The soul's desire therefore is after God alone.

"Early will I seek you," is the language of every one who is born of God. In the secret chamber his first waking thoughts will be,  
Where is God my Maker?  
Where is Jesus my Redeemer?  
Where is the blessed Spirit my Sanctifier and my Comforter?

In the public ordinances also especially will his soul desire communion with its God. It has beheld somewhat of God's power and glory in the manifestations of his love, and in the communications of his grace; and it bears those seasons in remembrance, and longs to have them renewed from time to time. The bare ordinances will not satisfy the believer, if God is not in them. It is not to perform a duty that he comes up to the sanctuary, but to meet his God, and enjoy sweet converse with him; and if he does not meet God there, he is like a man who, with much ardent expectation, has gone to a distant city to meet his friend, and has been disappointed of his hope; or rather he is like those of whom the prophet Jeremiah speaks, who in a season of extreme drought "came to the pits and found no water; and returning with their vessels empty, were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads, [Jeremiah 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.3)."

They know by sad experience that "there is no water" elsewhere; and if they do not find access to "God, the living fountain," their very "flesh" sympathizes with their "souls," and faints by reason of the painful disappointment. This is beautifully described in another Psalm, [Psalm 42:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-3); and it is realized in the experience of every believer, in proportion to the integrity of his soul before God, and to the measure of grace with which he is endued.

In perfect correspondence with the desires of a renewed soul, are,

II. The **purposes** of a renewed soul.

The believer determines to praise and glorify his God.

The language of his heart is, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed! I will sing and give praise." He knows what God has said, "Whoever offers me praise, glorifies me;" and he determines to offer unto God the tribute that is so justly due. Nor will he do this in a cold and formal manner; no; as a man of warm feelings expresses with his body the emotions of his soul—so will he, together with his heart, lift up his hands also in the name of his God. Nor will he pour forth these effusions only on some particular occasions, or during any one particular season; he will do it continually; he will do it to the last hour of his life. He considers "praise as lovely for the upright;" and he wishes it to be the constant language of his lips.

To this determination he is led by the consideration of the loving-kindness of his God.

O how wonderful does that love appear to him, which gave no less a person than God's co-equal co-eternal Son to die for him! which gave him too the knowledge of that Savior, together with all spiritual and eternal blessings in him—while thousands and millions of the human race are dying in ignorance and perishing in their sins! This loving-kindness so free, so rich, so full, appears to him "better than even life itself;" and all that he can do to testify his gratitude seems nothing, yes "less than nothing," in comparison with it. The language of his heart is, "If I should hold my peace, the very stones would cry out against me." O that I had powers equal to the occasion! How would I praise him! how would I glorify him! Truly I would praise him on earth, even as they do in Heaven.

In these purposes the believing soul is yet further confirmed by,

III. The **expectations** of a renewed soul.

The service of God is not without its reward even in this life; and hence the believer, while engaged in his favorite employment,

1. The believer expects the **richest consolation**.

The carnal mind can see no pleasure in this holy exercise; but the spiritual mind is refreshed by it, more than the most luxurious epicure ever was by the richest dainties. His very meditations are unspeakably sweet; yes, while contemplating his God upon his bed, and during the silent watches of the night, "his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness;" it has a foretaste even of Heaven itself; From its own experience of this heavenly joy, the soul expects this glorious harvest, when it has sown in tears, and labored to glorify its God in songs of praise.

2. The believer expects the most **assured safety**.

Thus engaged, the soul looks down upon all its enemies with disdain; it feels itself in an impregnable fortress; it is conscious that it owes all its past preservation to the help of its Almighty Friend; and it rejoices in the thought that under the shadow of the Redeemer's wings it must still be safe; and that "none shall ever pluck it out of the Father's hands." The state of Hezekiah, when surrounded by a vast army that was bent on his destruction, exactly shows what is the state of a believing soul in the midst of all its enemies, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, and laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you." Such was the language of Zion to all the Assyrian hosts; and such is the blessed anticipation of victory which every believer is privileged to enjoy! [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39).

Improvement.

1. How greatly do the generality of religious professors live below their privileges!

It was not peculiar to David thus to delight in God; it is common to all the saints. Can it be thought that we, who live under so much better a dispensation than he, and have so much brighter discoveries of God's power and glory than ever he had—should yet not be privileged to delight in God as he did? Were this the case, we would be losers by that religion which the Son of God came down from Heaven to establish. But it is not so; we may partake of all spiritual blessing in as rich abundance as he, or any other of the saints of old, did.

We have reason to be ashamed that:  
our desires after God are so faint,  
our purposes respecting him so weak, and  
our expectations from him so contracted.

Let us, each for himself, look at our experience from day to day, and compare it with his; and let us not rest until we have attained somewhat of that delight in God which so eminently distinguished that blessed man.

2. What encouragement have all to seek after God!

It was not only after David had so grievously transgressed, but at the very moment that God was chastening him for his transgressions, that he was thus favored of his God. Absalom's incest with David's wives was foretold by Nathan, as a part of David's punishment for his sin in taking to him the wife of his friend Uriah.

Can we then with propriety say, This mercy is not for me? it is not possible for such a sinner as I, ever to be thus highly favored? Know that there is no limit, either to the sovereign exercise of God's grace, or to its influence on the souls of men. His grace often most abounds, where sin has most abounded; and the vilest of us all may yet become the richest monument of God's love and mercy, if only, like David, he will humble himself for his iniquities, and sprinkle on his conscience the blood of our great sacrifice.

O beloved! know, if you come to God by Christ, you shall never be cast out; and if you commit yourself in faith entirely to Christ, you shall rejoice in him with joy unspeakable, and receive in due time the great end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls!

#601

FOLLOWING AFTER GOD

**[Psalm 63:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.8)**

"My soul follows hard after You; Your right hand upholds me!"

It has been said that Christian progress is more evinced by desires than by actual attainments. This sentiment is either true or false, according to the explanation given of it.

If it is meant that there can be any spiritual growth without attainments in holiness, or that growth in grace is to be measured by anything but actual attainments in every part of the divine life—then it is extremely erroneous.

But if it is meant, that our views of a Christian's duty, and our desires after a perfect conformity to the divine will, will increase beyond our actual attainments—then it is true. For a divinely enlightened soul has no bounds to its desires; but, alas! the good that it would do, it does not do; and the evil that it would notdo, that it does; so that, after all its exertions, it is constrained to say, "O what a wretched man I am! Who shall deliver me?"

With this the Psalmist's experience was in strict accordance. He speaks in the beginning of this Psalm, not as one who was in actual possession of all that he desired, but as one whose appetite for heavenly things was altogether insatiable, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." So again, in the words of my text, he speaks, not as one who had attained, but as one pressing forward in order to attain, "My soul follows hard after you."

But was he discouraged as one who had failed in his endeavors? No, he regarded the desires which he felt, and the endeavors which he put forth, as evidences that God was truly with him; and as grounds of hope that he should ultimately attain all that his heart could wish.

We see, then, here,

I. The experience of a heaven-born soul.

Two things are found in every child of God:

1. He has desires which nothing but God himself can satisfy.

The language of every enlightened soul is, "Whom have I in Heaven but you, O God? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)." He pants after peace and holiness; but how shall he obtain either the one or the other but from God himself? The world around him can contribute nothing, either to remove guilt from his conscience, or pollution from his soul.

Nor can he himself do anything for the effecting of these most desirable ends. If he looks at his past or present life, he can find nothing whereon to found his hopes of acceptance with God; his very best duties are so defective, that they fill him only with shame and sorrow. Not one action of his life can he present to God as perfect, or as deserving a recompense in the eternal world; much less can he present anything that shall, by its superabundant merit, purchase the forgiveness of former sins.

Then, as it respects future obedience, he finds how frail his firmest resolutions are, and how weak his strongest efforts. It is in his Redeemer alone that he can find either righteousness or strength; and hence to him he looks, in order that he may obtain from him those blessings which his soul so greatly needs.

2. He seeks after God for a supply of them.

"He follows hard after God." He follows after God in every way that God himself has appointed. He waits upon God in secret prayer, and implores help from him in sighs and groans and tears. He "wrestles with God," even as Jacob of old did; and will not let him go until he has conferred the desired blessing. In public ordinances, too, he waits, as at Bethesda's pool, for the stirring of the waters, and for the communication of the benefits he so greatly needs.

Nor does he yield to discouragement, because he does not presently obtain all that he desires; he is content to "tarry the Lord's leisure," assured that he shall not be ultimately cast out, or allowed "to seek the Lord in vain."

The whole of this experience may be seen in another Psalm, where David places in one view the greatness of his necessities, and the urgency of his requests, "I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah. Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul! [Psalm 143:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.6-8)."

That we may not think too unfavorably of this experience, let us notice,

II. The confidence which it is calculated to inspire.

The Psalmist, in the latter clause, did not merely intend to assert a fact, but to mark the connection of that fact with the experience which he had just delineated; and which he regarded:

1. As an evidence of mercies received.

He was conscious of ardent desires after God, and of laborious exertions in seeking after him. But whence was it that such desires had ever arisen in his mind? And how did the ever come to be put forth into act? And whence had he derived that firmness of character, that he could persevere in his pursuit of God, under all the discouragements which he had to contend with?

Were these the spontaneous product of his own heart?

Or were they infused into him by other men?

Or did they arise out of any contingent circumstances capable of producing them?

No! these holy desires sprang from God alone, who had cast, as it were, the mantle of his love upon him, and drawn him to himself! It was "God who in the day of his power had made him willing" to renounce all his former pursuits, and to follow after Christ as the God of his salvation. God had "made him willing in the day of his power," and had kept him hitherto in his everlasting arms. Of all this, his experience was a decisive proof and evidence; and he could not but say, "He who has wrought me to the self-same thing is God."

2. As a pledge of yet further mercies in reserve.

In this light God's mercies may with great propriety be viewed; and I doubt not but that this idea was intended to be expressed in the words before us. It is precisely what David more fully expressed in another Psalm; where, having said to God, "You have delivered my soul from death," he adds, "Will you not keep my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling—that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living, [Psalm 56:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.13)."

This was a legitimate inference from the premises which he had stated; and Paul drew the same inference with a yet stronger measure of confidence and assurance; saying to his Philippian converts, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." Paul, in particular saw that there was an inseparable connection between grace and glory. "For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. [Romans 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29-30)." A sweet truth it is, that "He will not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22);" and that "whom he loves, he loves unto the end! [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1)."

ADDRESS.

1. The lukewarm Christian.

Having spoken favorably of good desires, I must guard with all possible care against a misapprehension of my meaning. It is said in Scripture, "The desire of the slothful kills him; for his hands refuse to labor, [Proverbs 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.25)." This is a very solemn truth; for there are many who rest satisfied with languid desires, instead of laboring for the things desired. Against such a state our blessed Lord very strongly cautions us, when he says, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24)." "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence; and the violent must take it by force, [Matthew 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.12)." And, whatever be your opinions about the unchangeableness of God's love, you may be perfectly sure that you are not walking acceptably with him, unless you can say with truth, "My soul follows hard after God!"

2. The earnest and zealous Christian.

Whatever attainments you make in the divine life, never forget to whom they must all be ascribed. A ball would as soon return of itself to the cannon's mouth, from whence it had been shot forth, as you of yourself would ever have returned unto God. And a new-born infant would as soon provide for all its own needs, as you would have preserved yourself, by any power of your own, in the ways of God. It is God who in the first instance quickened you from the dead, and "gave you both to will and to do" what was pleasing in his sight. Give him, then, the glory of all that your either are or have; and live dependent on him even to the end; for it is he, and he alone, who can uphold you; and as "he is able to keep you from falling, so he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy! Jude verse 24."

#602

CONSOLATION IN GOD

**[Psalm 65:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.3)**

"Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, you shall purge them away!"

From reading the experience of the saints, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, we derive not only comfort and encouragement, but the most refined instruction that can be conveyed to the mind of man. As in light there is a combination of widely different rays, and it is that combination, together with their simultaneous action, which gives to light its peculiar sweetness. Just so, it is a combination of widely different views and feelings that gives to the Christian his divinely-tempered experience in the things of God.

In the passage before us, we behold the man after God's own heart bewailing his sinfulness—yet not discouraged; and sweetly comforted in his soul, without any abatement of his contrition. It is this mixture of feeling which so greatly elevates the Christian character. His graces, by means of it, shine with a subdued luster; and being thus tempered, they are "pleasing to the eyes both of God and man, [Ecclesiastes 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.7)." Let us notice,

I. David's **distress**.

What are we to understand by this expression, "Iniquities prevail against me?"

It cannot be meant that he indulged in sin of any kind; for "one who is born of God does not practice sin; nor indeed can he practice sin (willingly and habitually), because he is born of God." "Whoever practices sin in this way, is of the devil! 1 [John 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.8-9)."

Indeed the very terms here used suppose a conflict. David hated and resisted sin in the daily habit of his mind; but he had within him a principle of evil as well as of good, "the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that he could not do the things that he would, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)." He was in the same predicament with the Apostle Paul; who, though he delighted in the Law of God after the inward man, "found a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members." And under a painful sense of his infirmities he cried, "O what a wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death," which I am constrained thus to drag along with me, as a putrid carcass, even to my dying hour! [Romans 7:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22-24).

Alluding to a punishment which some tyrants have inflicted on the objects of their displeasure. We understand, therefore, David as saying precisely what Paul also says, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing, [Romans 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18-19)."

And who is there among us that has not reason to adopt this language in reference to his own soul?

If we look at the workings of actual corruption, we shall all find occasion to confess, "Iniquities prevail against me." All, it is true, are not guilty of gross sin; but who is free from indwelling corruption? "Who can say, I have made my heart clean? [Proverbs 20:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.9)." There is an abundance both of "spiritual and fleshly filthiness" in every man, 2 Corinthians 7:1; the most eminent saint on earth is renewed but in part, [1 Corinthians 13:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.9-10). It is in Heaven alone that absolute perfection exists. He can know but little of himself who does not see occasion to mourn over his many evil thoughts, and many corrupt propensities!

Let us take a view of the workings of our hearts in relation to pride, envy, malice, and revenge.

Let us call to mind the motions of anger, fretfulness, and impatience, of which our consciences must convict us.

Let us trace the influence of uncharitableness towards those who stand in competition with us, or have made themselves in any way liable to our displeasure.

We may soon discover how far any of us are from being perfect, and what need we all have to cry, "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you! [Psalm 143:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.2)."

But let us look at our short-comings and defects, and then we shall find no difficulty in adopting the words of David in our text. The true way to discover our real state before God, is to take his holy Law as the standard whereby to try our habits and attainments. How far are any of us from loving God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength; and our neighbor as ourselves! Only let us notice the frame of our souls through the day, yes even in the exercises of devotion, and we shall have no need for anyone to tell us how far we are still alienated from God, and how little we have attained of habitual communion with him.

Though we may, on the whole, be kind towards our neighbor, let us only be brought by any circumstances into actual collision with him, and we shall reveal to others at least, if not discern in ourselves, how very far short of the divine standard our love to him is, and how unlike we are to Christ, who "laid down his life for his enemies."

Let us go on to examine the state of our souls in reference to our blessed Lord and Savior, who died for us. What admiring and adoring thoughts of him should we entertain from day to day, from hour to hour! What floods of tears should run down our cheeks from a sense of love and gratitude to him for all the wonders of his love; and what an influence should they produce on the whole of our life and conduct.

I need go no further to confirm the truth which I am inculcating, namely, that "iniquities do indeed prevail against us" to a fearful extent; and that all of us have need to "walk softly before God" in the remembrance of them, [Isaiah 38:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.15).

But, if we partake of David's sorrows, we may also be partakers of,

II. David's **consolation**.

As the Apostle, after his lamentation, found comfort in Christ, so David also found consolation in God through Christ.

1. We may derive comfort from the free grace and mercy of God.

It is evident that he regards God as a gracious and merciful Being, who would "not be extreme to mark what was done amiss, [Psalm 130:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.3); but would in judgment remember mercy. And this ground of hope is open to us all; for mercy is the darling attribute of God, if I may so speak, the attribute "in which he delights, [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18);" while judgment is that strange work to which he is utterly averse, [Isaiah 28:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.21).

See the description which Jehovah gives of his own character, "I am the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin! [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7)." See also his marvelous displays of this attribute towards men; to what an extent it could reach, 2 Chronicles 33:19, and with what rapidity it could fly to the discharge of its delightful office, [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13). Hear the language in which God "reasons" with sinners; (O, blessed reasoning! I pray God it may convince us all, and not leave so much as a shadow of doubt upon our minds!) "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool! [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18)." Yes, brethren, however discouraging your inward conflicts may be, you may well "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God! [1 Samuel 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.6)."

2. We may derive comfort from the sufficiency of the means ordained by God.

God had appointed sacrifices as an atonement for sin; and, though "they could never take away sin," or "make a man perfect as pertaining to the conscience, [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9); [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14); [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4); [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14)," they directed the offerers to that one great sacrifice which was in due time to be offered on the cross, and which was a sufficient "atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2)." And, in the view of that sacrifice, David, with all his enormous guilt upon him, could say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean! Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7)."

Who then among us shall despair of mercy, if only we seek it in the Savior's name? Indeed it is not mercy only, but justice also, that shall plead for us, if we approach our God in the name of Christ; for we are told that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness! 1 [John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.9)."

Here, then, let the drooping sinner take courage; and to his complaints, that "iniquities prevail against him," add the consolatory truth, "As for my transgressions, O Lord, you shall purge them away!" You have "opened a fountain for sin and for impurity, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1);" and I believe that it shall be sufficient even for me; and that "the blood of Jesus Christ, your Son, shall cleanse me from all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)."

To all of you, then, I would say,

1. Acquaint yourselves with your own ways, that you may be truly humbled.

There can be no humility without self-knowledge; nor must anyone be satisfied with an examination of his outward conduct; (that, like Paul's in his unconverted state, may be "blameless, [Philippians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.6)."). We must search our hearts, if we would know ourselves aright; yes, and "beg of God also to search and test us," if we would attain that kind of self-knowledge which alone will be sufficient to humble our proud spirits, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24).

Mark, then, I beg you:  
your thoughts,  
your desires,  
your motives,  
your principles, and  
the entire habit of your minds before God.

Mark all your tempers under the various circumstances that arise from day to day; and compare yourselves with the requirements of the Law, and with that great exemplar, the Lord Jesus Christ! Do this, and you will find no temptation to pride yourselves on your attainments, or to exalt yourselves above your less favored brethren. You will find your place, where the Apostle found his, among the chief of sinners, and will vie with him in magnifying and adoring the grace of God!

2. "Acquaint yourselves with God, that you may be at peace".

This was the advice which Eliphaz gave to Job, [Job 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.21), and which I would give to every one of you. It is self-knowledge which alone can humble us; but it is the knowledge of God alone that can afford us any comfort. Indeed, the more we know of our indwelling corruptions, the more shall we despair, if we do not proportionably grow in the knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ. But if we bear in mind what we have already stated respecting the character of God, and the sufficiency of that sacrifice which Christ has offered for us—we shall attain that precise frame of mind, that just admixture:  
of hope and fear,  
of joy and sorrow,  
of confidence and abasement,  
which constitutes the perfection of Christian experience, and leads to the highest possible attainments in the divine life.

Go then, every one of you, my brethren, to God in Christ Jesus. Carry nothing with you but your sins! Do not think of purging them away by anything that you yourselves can do; but cast yourselves upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus; and expect from him the mercy which you need for the pardon of your sins, and the grace which you need for the maintenance of your future conflicts. Only go with Paul, crying, "O what a wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" and you shall be enabled to add with him, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! [Romans 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.25)."

#603

THE BLESSEDNESS OF WAITING UPON GOD

**[Psalm 65:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.4)**

"Blessed are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy temple!"

The connection between genuine piety and happiness, though not seen by the generality of men, is certain. It may not presently appear; but it will approve itself, at last, to all who will wait for the outcome of passing events. To the ungodly man it seems a drudgery to wait upon God; but to every humble and believing suppliant it will be found a source of unbounded bliss; so at least the Psalmist affirms in the words before us; from which we shall take occasion to notice,

I. The habit of God's chosen people.

It is the delight of every true Christian to draw near unto his God.

He feels, like the Psalmist, that "iniquity has prevailed against him" to a very fearful extent; but he sees that an all-sufficient atonement has been offered for him; and that, through the blood of Christ once shed on Calvary, "every transgression that he has ever committed may be purged away! verse 3." Hence he approaches God with all humility as a sinner, and with all earnestness, as one that desires mercy at his hands.

Nor is it on some particular occasions only that his people draw near to him. They resemble the priests of old, whose rooms were in the temple, round about the sanctuary; and who therefore "dwelt in his courts;" for, in the habit of their minds at least, "they dwell in God" by meditation and prayer; and "God dwells in them" by the abiding influence of his Spirit and grace.

To this is every true Christian brought by the mighty working of the power of God.

It is not by any natural power that the saints draw near unto God. Of themselves, they would flee from God, even as our first parents did in Paradise. It is "God himself who draws them, [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44)," and who from all eternity "chose them" to this high honor. They are unto the Lord "a holy priesthood, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9);" and what God said to Eli may, in a spiritual sense, be applied to them, "This is what the LORD says: 'Did I not clearly reveal myself to your father's house when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? I chose your father out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your father's house all the offerings made with fire by the Israelites, [1 Samuel 2:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.27-28)." In like manner has God chosen from eternity, and "set apart for himself" in time, all those who by "a spirit of grace and of supplication" approach unto him! [Psalm 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.3). [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10). Hence it is, and hence alone, that they are "a people near unto him, [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14)."

It is not without reason that David declares,

II. The blessedness resulting from their drawing near to God.

The terms in which he states this, convey the idea most richly to our minds.

The priests, while serving at the altar, "partook of the altar," and "lived of the altar." See the particular account, as stated by Moses. "Then the LORD said to Aaron: "I myself have put you in charge of the offerings presented to me; all the holy offerings the Israelites give me I give to you and your sons as your portion and regular share. You are to have the part of the most holy offerings that is kept from the fire. From all the gifts they bring me as most holy offerings, whether grain or sin or guilt offerings, that part belongs to you and your sons. Eat it as something most holy; every male shall eat it. You must regard it as holy. This also is yours: whatever is set aside from the gifts of all the wave offerings of the Israelites. I give this to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it. I give you all the finest olive oil and all the finest new wine and grain they give the LORD as the firstfruits of their harvest. All the land's firstfruits that they bring to the LORD will be yours. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it. Everything in Israel that is devoted to the LORD is yours! [Numbers 18:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.8-14)." Let this be noticed; and it will be seen that the priests of old were richly provided for, and well sustained by the bounty of God's house.

And here we see indeed the blessedness of waiting upon God.

God's people, now, are "priests unto their God! [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6)." And this is the sustenance which, in a spiritual sense, is provided for them. Mark the wonderful correspondence between the Prophet Jeremiah, when describing the times of the Gospel, and Moses, in the fore-cited passage, declaring the ordinances of the Law,

"They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD—the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the LORD, [Jeremiah 31:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.12); [Jeremiah 31:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.14)."

Who does not see in this the accomplishment of my text? In communion with God, the souls of men are filled as with marrow and fatness, while their mouth praises him with joyful lips!

"How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights! [Psalm 36:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.7-8)."

In truth, no tongue can declare, no imagination can conceive—the full extent of those benefits which men obtain by waiting upon God:  
"the riches that they obtain are unsearchable;"  
their "peace surpasses all understanding;" and  
their "joy is unspeakable and full of glory."

See, then, I beg you, brethren,

1. How different is the outcome of men's various pursuits!

Is the worldling ever thus replenished to satiety? Never! He grasps a shadow; and "in the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him; the full force of misery will come upon him! [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)."

But the true Christian finds in his God all that his soul can desire; and "drinking of the water that Christ gives him, he never thirsts again" for anything that this vain world can afford! [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14).

2. What a preparation for Heaven is the Christian's employment upon earth!

It is the delight of the Christian to draw near to God, and to offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise. And what, I beg you, are they doing in Heaven? The only difference is, that here they pour forth their prayers under the influence of hope; but in Heaven, their one sacrifice is praise, called forth without ceasing, under a sense of complete, uninterrupted fruition.

Let, then, every soul among you adopt the habit of holy David, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple, [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4)."

#604

GOD'S WORKS OF PROVIDENCE AND GRACE

**[Psalm 65:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.9-13)**

"You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing!"

On what occasion this Psalm was written is not certainly known; but it is probable that the inspired penman wrote it on the removal of the famine which God sent to punish the cruelty of Saul and of his bloody house towards the Gibeonites, whom he was bound by covenant to protect. This famine lasted three years; but at last, David having inquired of the Lord on what account this heavy judgment had been sent, and how the removal of it might be obtained—he was informed, that it was sent as a punishment of Saul's treachery, in which the people, no doubt, had too willingly concurred; and that he must execute on Saul's posterity such a judgment as the Gibeonites themselves should award to them.

The Gibeonites demanded that seven of Saul's sons should be put to death. Seven of his sons were accordingly delivered into their hands, and were hanged up by them, as an atonement for their father's sin, 2 Samuel 21:1-9. The Gibeonites being now satisfied with this act of retributive justice, the favor of God was restored to the land, and the whole nation was gladdened with the return of plenty.

Under this great calamity, David and all the pious of the land had humbled themselves before God; and in this Psalm they acknowledge God as the merciful Answerer of prayer to his penitent people, while he was the just Punisher of sin to those who continued impenitent. "He had lately answered them by terrible things in righteousness" for their transgressions; and now he had mercifully "heard their prayer," and "purged away their transgressions."

The words before us give a lively and beautiful description of the change wrought upon the earth through the rich showers with which God, in his mercy, had watered it.

Of course our attention therefore must, in the first place, be fixed on those blessings of providence with which we also are favored. Yet, as throughout all the inspired writings there will be found a reference to spiritual blessings, under those terms which at first sight appear to have only a literal import—it will be proper to notice, also, what we conceive to be spiritually contained in this passage. Agreeably to this view, we shall consider the text:

I. As literally fulfilled in the blessings of God's Providence.

God is, in reality, "the giver of every good and perfect gift".

Because God, in the first creation of the world, assigned to everything its proper place and office, we are apt to overlook his agency in the things of daily occurrence, and to ascribe them to what are called the laws of nature. But the hand of God is as necessary to uphold the universe, as ever it was to create it at first.

The heavenly bodies, it is true, have had their motions given them from the beginning; and have, for the most part, continued to obey the laws of their creation. But they have occasionally had those laws suspended; as when the sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, for the space of a whole day. From hence it appears, that God's laws move in subserviency to the will of their Creator, and execute his righteous purposes of vengeance or of love, according to his command.

The same may be said respecting the elements of this terrestrial globe. Fire and water have their properties; according to which, for the most part, they act; but at God's command the waters stood like a wall, to form a passage and a rampart for his chosen people; and the fire lost its power even to singe the clothes of his faithful servants, who were cast into it for their fidelity to him.

In like manner, the earth produces fruits of different kinds; and the rains at certain seasons descend to call forth into activity its vegetative powers. But the agency both of the heavens and the earth depends altogether upon God, who, when he sees fit, "makes the heavens as brass," and the earth as iron.

In a climate like ours, where the rains are frequent and occasional, God's agency is but little seen; but in countries where the rains are periodical, the lack of them is so severely felt, that the goodness of God in sending them is more sensibly perceived, and more readily acknowledged. But in one place as well as in another, the influences both of Heaven and earth are alike dependent upon God, and must be referred to Him as their true, and only, and continual source.

God's bounty and goodness should be gratefully acknowledged by us at this time.

Extremely beautiful is the description here given of the progress of vegetation, in consequence of a seasonable supply of rain. To attempt an illustration of these words would weaken their force, and reduce their sublimity. But, if a poetic taste alone can qualify us to appreciate their beauty, and to enter into them with a befitting zest—a spiritual taste also is necessary, to lead us to a due improvement of them, and to enable us to realize their full import. However, whether gifted with a poetic imagination or not—let me entreat all to survey the face of the earth, and to see the change that has been wrought on everything around him. Methinks, without any poetic imagination, he may see the smiles of universal nature, and hear the songs and shoutings of a grateful world. May our hearts respond to the voice of nature, and ascend up in praises and thanksgivings to our bounteous God.

But let us further view the text,

II. As **emblematically**describing the yet richer blessings of his grace.

Besides the primary sense of Scripture, there is frequently a secondary and subordinate meaning which ought not to be overlooked. In relation to this matter, the New Testament affords us the fullest information, in that it cites many passages in which we would have had no conception of anything beyond the literal meaning, if a further sense had not been unfolded to us by Him whose wisdom cannot err, and whose authority cannot be questioned.

The whole 104th Psalm, in appearance, relates to the works of creation and providence; but towards the close of it we are led, though but cursorily and obscurely, to the contemplation of God's spiritual government; in which view, the Psalm is appointed by our Church to be read on the day whereon the out-pouring of the Spirit is more especially commemorated.

The Psalm before us may with equal propriety be viewed in the same light; and the rather, because the images used in our text are frequently applied to that very subject, to represent the influence of God's Spirit on the soul, "His doctrine dropping as the rain, and distilling as the dew; as the light rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass, [Deuteronomy 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.2)."

1. Let us notice, then, the influence of the Gospel upon the world at large.

Truly, the whole world is one great wilderness; some few spots only giving any just evidence of cultivation. It is not above one-sixth part of mankind that has even so much as heard of the name of Jesus; and where his Gospel is not preached, sin reigns without control. Even religion itself is nothing but a blind and bloody superstition, involving its votaries in everything that is cruel and detestable.

But see where the Gospel has gained an ascendant; look at Britain, for instance, and compare its state at this time with its state previous to the introduction of Christianity; once it was a dreary desert—but now it blossoms as the rose, and is as the garden of Eden. True it is that the name of Christianity effects but little; it civilizes, indeed, and raises the standard of morals—but it produces nothing corresponding with the description before us.

But when "the Word comes, not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance," then a great and mighty change is effected, "the Spirit being poured out from on high, the wilderness becomes a fruitful field; and the fruitful field is so abundant, that it is even counted for a forest, [Isaiah 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.15)." Could we but inspect the various settlements where zealous ministers have established churches among the savages of different climates, and see the difference between them and their yet uninstructed countrymen—we would have a far juster notion of the power of the Gospel than we can acquire in the midst of civilized society, where little remains to be added to the external deportment, and where the change effected by the Gospel is chiefly of a spiritual and internal nature. But the whole subject will be more fully open to us, if we view the Gospel as operating thus:

2. Let us notice the influence of the Gospel upon the souls of individual believers.

What were any of us in our unconverted state, but, like a barren heath, bringing forth briars and thorns, without any of those fruits of righteousness in which God delights? As for humiliation before God, and a simple life of faith in the Lord Jesus, and a delight in spiritual exercises, and an entire devotedness of the soul to God—we were as much strangers to it all as the heathen themselves! But when the word of the Gospel came with power to our souls, it wrought a change upon our whole man, and made us altogether new creatures, "Old things passed away; and, behold, all things became new!" The obdurate surface of our hearts was softened; and the unproductive soil put forth a vital energy; by means of which all the fruits of the Spirit sprang up in rich abundance, and gave a hopeful prospect of a luxuriant harvest.

Would we see this realized in a way that cannot be misunderstood, let us look at the converts on the day of Pentecost. It is not possible to conceive people more destitute of all good, or more filled with every hateful quality, than were the crucifiers and murderers of the Lord of Glory! Yet in a short time they were so changed, so that they remain to this day the most exalted patterns of piety to the whole world.

Thus it is at this day, also, among ourselves. The work, indeed, is not so sudden, nor so general; but, where the grace of the Gospel is received in truth, it operates precisely in the same way, "instead of the brier, there grows up the fir-tree; and instead of the thorn, there grows up the myrtle-tree; and even the tenderest plants rise in stately magnificence into "trees of righteousness, whereby the Lord is glorified."

APPLICATION.

1. Let me now call you to adore your God for the blessings you have already received.

I would not that you should overlook the blessings of Providence. Even in this country we have often known the sad effects of scarcity; and we may well, therefore, bless our God for the prospects of abundance. To every one of you I would say, with David, "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call!

[Psalm 147:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.7-9)."

And will you not much more adore him for the blessings of his grace? Surely, if you do not, the very stones will cry out against you! Yet rest not in mere acknowledgments, however grateful they may be; but seek to abound in fruits of righteousness; which, while they are the necessary evidences of his work upon your souls, are the only effectual means of bringing honor to his name.

2. Let me now call you to look to God continually for fresh and more abundant communications of his grace.

The fertilizing showers which we have received will be of little avail, if they are not renewed from time to time. Just so, all the grace that any of us have received, will be ineffectual for any permanent good, if we are not favored with fresh "supplies of the Holy Spirit" from day to day. The grace which has been imparted to our souls this day, will no more suffice for our spiritual needs tomorrow, than will the light which has been communicated to our bodies. We must receive out of Christ's fullness from day to day, as the branch of the vine receives from its stem and root. Let your daily prayer, then, be like that of David, "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water! [Psalm 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1)."

In reading the word, and in the public ordinances, look up for the blessing of God upon your soul; and plead with him that gracious promise, "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams! [Isaiah 44:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3-4)."

Yes, Beloved, look unto God with increasing earnestness and confidence; and he will pour out upon you "showers of blessings."

"I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; his young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon, [Hosea 14:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4-7)."

#605

PRESERVATION THE GIFT OF GOD

**[Psalm 66:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.8-9)**

"Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard. He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping!"

[This was preached on occasion of a person who had made a profession of religion—then going back to drunkenness, and dying in a drunken fit.]

The blessings of Providence, when uninterruptedly continued, are scarcely noticed; it is only when the loss of them has been painfully withdrawn, that we consider how much we were indebted to God for them.

What the particular trials that had been endured by David or the Jewish nation were, we cannot precisely determine; but it is evident, that the deliverance given to them had made a lively impression on the Psalmist's mind. Compare verses 1, 2 with verses 10-12.

The words of our text would furnish exceedingly profitable meditations, if we confined them to their primary import; since the preservation of our life and health, amidst the many seen and unseen dangers with which we are surrounded, demands our most grateful acknowledgments. But a subsequent part of the Psalm shows clearly that the writer had respect also to spiritual blessings, verse 16; and therefore we shall draw your attention more especially to them; and show:

I. What a mercy it is to be upheld in the ways of God.

We feel somewhat of the obligation conferred upon us in our first awakening and conversion; but are by no means duly sensible how much we owe to our God for our daily preservation. But we shall learn better to appreciate this mercy if we consider,

1. To how many snares and dangers we are exposed!

We have frequent occasion to note the temptations with which we are encompassed in the world; and to notice the still greater dangers we experience from the corruptions of our own hearts; and the additional conflicts which we have to sustain with all the powers of darkness.

We will not dwell so particularly on those things at this time; but rather mention the danger to which we are exposed, even from lawful things. It is not only allowable, but highly proper, to prosecute our worldly callings with diligence; and to cultivate the tenderest regard for our wife and children—yet both the one and the other may engross too much of our hearts, and become hindrances to us in our journey towards Heaven! Our food, our sleep, our studies, our recreations—may all become snares, if we are not continually on our guard. It is therefore an unspeakable mercy to be upheld in the midst of such manifold temptations!

2. How many, in like circumstances with ourselves, have fallen.

We are living in the full enjoyment of divine ordinances, and of whatever can conduce to the welfare of our souls. But are we therefore secure? Look back to the apostolic age, and see how many then were:

Seduced by error! [Titus 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.11). [2 Timothy 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.18).

Or disheartened by the fear of man! [2 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.15); [2 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16). [Matthew 26:73-74](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.73-74).

Or turned aside by the love of the world! [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22). [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10).

Or overthrown by unbridled passions! [1 Timothy 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.11-12). [2 Samuel 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 11.4).

What reason then have we to adore the grace of God that has preserved us!

3. What would be the probable consequence of our falling.

Some who have fallen have been restored speedily, [John 21:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.15-17); and some after a lapse of time, [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13); but thousands have fallen to rise no more!

The progress of spiritual declension is for the most part rapid:  
The heart becomes averse to holy duties.  
From secret neglects, proceeds a backwardness to spiritual fellowship.  
The conscience is gradually weakened, until it ceases to perform its office, or speaks in so faint a voice that it is scarcely heard.  
The besetting sin then gains an entire ascendant, and leads him captive.  
Until at last, God, filled with indignation against the base apostate, "gives him up to a reprobate mind," and either cuts him off by a sudden stroke, or leaves him to protract a miserable existence, merely that he may bear testimony against his own impieties, and proclaim to those around him the foretastes which he already feels of his eternal destiny! [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12), [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1). [Acts 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.5); [Acts 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.10). [Ecclesiastes 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.17) with [Proverbs 14:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.32).

See other examples in [1 Corinthians 10:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.6-11). What a mercy it is that we ourselves, instead of being warned by others, are not made a warning to others!

4. What occasion we have given to God to let us fall.

Let us call to mind our own backslidings:  
our secret neglects;  
our tamperings with temptations;  
our indulgence of evil passions;  
our vain-confident presumption  
—is it not astonishing that God has not long since said respecting us:

"Let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)."

"My Spirit shall strive with him no longer! [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3)."

"He has no desire to retain God in his knowledge; so I will give him up! [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28)."

If we are convinced of these things, let us proceed to consider,

II. The duty of those who experience God's mercy.

There can be no doubt on this subject. If our souls have been upheld in life:

1. We should acknowledge God's hand in preserving us.

"Who is it that has made us to differ" from others? [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7). Have we by nature any more strength than others? Have we of ourselves a more abundant measure of goodness than others? No; it is "by the grace of God that we are what we are! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)." We have been as much indebted to God's protecting hand, as a new-born infant is to its mother's care. We should then acknowledge, that "of him, our fruit is found, [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8). [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12);" that "it is God who has made us for this very purpose, [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5);" and that to him belongs all the glory of our stability, [Psalm 62:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.8); [Psalm 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.12).

2. We should bless and adore him for his great goodness to us.

It is not by cold acknowledgments merely that we are to requite the Lord, but by fervent and devout thanksgivings. It is not possible for language adequately to express the obligations we owe to him; and therefore we should call upon "all that is within us to bless his holy name."

Nor should we be content with doing this ourselves; we should invite the whole creation, as it were, to join us. We should labor to stimulate all to love and serve him; and to make his name known to the very ends of the earth, [Isaiah 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.4-6). or [42:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isaiah 42.10-12).

It is in this way that we should endeavor at least, as much as in us lies, to "render unto the Lord according to the benefits" he has conferred upon us.

3. We should walk humbly and carefully before him.

We must not presume upon the kindness of our God, or imagine that, because we have been upheld hitherto, we are in no danger of falling. If we had attained the stability of Paul himself, "we must keep our body under control, and bring it into subjection, lest we become cast-always ourselves, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)." To neglect this, would be to tempt God. God has warned us plainly, that "he will be with us no longer than we continue with him; but that if we forsake him, he will forsake us, 2 Chronicles 13:2." We therefore must not be high-minded, but fear, 1 Corinthians 10:12; and take heed lest we fall, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20); and "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation! [Matthew 26:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.41)."

If we would have our God to keep us, we must be careful to "keep ourselves, verse 18 with Jude verses 20, 21." We must look at the fearful examples that are before our eyes, [Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.32). [Hebrews 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.11), and tremble lest we ourselves become similar monuments of instability, and of God's deserved wrath!

4. We should commit ourselves continually to him.

God has engaged to "keep the feet of his saints, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9);" and directed us to commit ourselves to him for that purpose, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19); and assured us, that, if we do so, "he will establish our goings, 2 Chronicles 20:20." We should commit ourselves therefore to his gracious care and protection. We should say with David, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps do not slip! [Psalm 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.5);" "Hold me up, and I shall be safe! [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117)."

To this we are encouraged by our past experience of his mercy; we may from the kindness already shown to us, safely infer the continuance of it to our souls, [Psalm 56:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.13). If we can say, "He has delivered," we may properly add, "In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us! 2 Corinthians 1:10."

But here arise two important questions, which it is of the utmost importance to resolve:

1. Are our souls **really**alive to God?

In vain shall we speak of having "our souls upheld in life," if they have never yet been quickened from the dead. Let us then seriously, and as in the presence of God, inquire whether we have been made partakers of a new and living principle, whereby we have been enabled to die unto sin, and to live unto God?

Let us not mistake a mere approval of religion, for real regeneration. If we have been truly born again, we must have become new creatures, having new views, new desires, new pursuits, and new prospects, 2 Corinthians 5:17. If this change has not been wrought within us, we are yet in our natural and unconverted state; we may have "a name to live, but are really dead" before God; notwithstanding we may have been preserved from any flagrant sins, we are yet "dead in trespasses and sins!"

2. Supposing that we are on the whole alive to God, have "our feet really been kept from falling?"

We must ascertain this fact, before we can cordially thank God for it. And is it indeed true of all who profess religion among us, that they have been kept? Have none of us acted unworthy of our high calling? Has there been nothing in our tempers, nothing in our worldly transactions, inconsistent with our profession? Or, supposing our outward conduct to have been unimpeachable, have there been no secret sins, which we have reason to mourn over; nothing for which we ought to blush and be confounded before God? Perhaps, if we look inward—then we shall find more occasion to bewail our falls, than to bless our God for having kept us from falling.

But, if conscience testifies that we have indeed walked uprightly before God, then let us imitate the example in the text, and not only bless and magnify him ourselves, but endeavor also to make the voice of his praise to be heard throughout the world. "Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard."

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ANSWERS TO PRAYER ACKNOWLEDGED

**[Psalm 66:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.16)**

"Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul!"

Any person of benevolence who should have discovered an antidote, or remedy, to a very fatal disorder—would feel happy in communicating information respecting it, wherever such knowledge was required. If indeed great gain would accrue to him by concealment, we must concede to him the right of procuring to himself the advantages to which his superior knowledge has entitled him; but where the very act of communicating information will enrich, rather than impoverish, the instructor, and he himself will be made a gainer by imparting, he would be highly criminal if he withheld from the world the blessings he was enabled to confer.

This is invariably the case in things pertaining to the soul; and hence we may expect to find all who have been taught BY God, ready and willing to impart to others the benefits they have received. The early Apostles, Andrew and Philip, no sooner found the Messiah, than they sought to bring their brethren, Peter and Nathanael, to an acquaintance with him, [John 1:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.40); [John 1:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.45). Just so, the Samaritan woman was no sooner convinced herself of the Messiahship of Jesus, than she went to invite all the men of her city to come and see the person whom she believed to be the Christ! [John 4:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.28-29).

Thus it was with David; he communed much with God; he learned much from God; he was favored with the richest communications which God himself could bestow. But he would not keep these things to himself; he hoped, by a free communication with pious men, to bring them to a participation of all that he himself enjoyed; and therefore, filled with divine philanthropy, he sent out, as it were, this general invitation, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul!"

In discoursing on these words, we will show:

I. What God had done for his soul.

David, as we are told in the foregoing context, had been involved in many troubles, from which nothing but a Divine interposition could have delivered him, verse 10-12. But we must not confine the subject to temporal deliverances; he speaks of something which God had done for "his soul;" and more particularly specifies, that God "had not turned away his mercy from him, verse 20;" and makes that the peculiar ground of his praise and thanksgiving. We observe then that:

1. God had given to him **the pardon of his sins**.

This would have been an exceedingly rich mercy, even if David had never fallen from his former integrity. But, if we view the great enormities committed by him in the matter of Uriah, we see good reason why he should magnify God's mercy beyond any other of the sons of men. Whether this Psalm was written prior, or subsequent to his fall, we know not; and therefore we forbear to notice that as an aggravation of his guilt, or as enhancing the mercy given to him.

As a man, he was a sinner from his mother's womb; and the most perfect of men could no more stand than the vilest—if God should enter into judgment with him, and mark in him all that had been done amiss! David was sensible of this, and acknowledged it in these expressive terms, "I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; and I will glorify your name for evermore; for great is your mercy towards me; and you have delivered my soul from the lowest Hell! [Psalm 86:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.12-13)."

Let us be sensible how much we also stand in need of mercy; and let us seek it as that without which our souls must forever perish. Or, if we have received mercy, let us devoutly glorify our God for it as a benefit which no words can ever adequately express.

2. God had given to him **the *manifestation*of that pardon to his soul**.

David had prayed earnestly to God, and had obtained an answer to his prayer. How this answer was conveyed to his mind, we are not informed; but he had no doubt in his own soul respecting it; he could say, "Truly God has heard me; he has attended to the voice of my prayer! verse 19."

O! who can estimate aright this mercy? See how the prophet Jeremiah speaks of it, "I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief." You came near when I called you, and you said, "Do not fear!"

[Lamentations 3:55-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.55-57)." How tender! How sympathetic! How encouraging this acknowledgment! Such was David's also, on another occasion, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles! [Psalm 34:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.4); [Psalm 34:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.6)." Truly this is a great and blessed work which "the Lord does for the souls" of men; and it was with good reason that David said, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul!"

But it will be proper to state more particularly,

II. Why David was so ready to speak of it.

It was not from ostentation or vanity that he thus called the attention of others to his own concerns, but,

1. From a sense of **gratitude to God**.

Such mercies call for the liveliest gratitude, and demand a tribute of praise from the whole world. Hence the soul that feels its obligations for them, would be glad to interest the whole creation in the blessed work of praise and thanksgiving. This David attempts in many of his Psalms, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt his name together! [Psalm 34:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.1-3); [Psalm 96:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 96.1-4)."

Had any reflection been cast on him for these devout acknowledgments, he would have replied, as on another occasion, "Is there not a cause? 1 Samuel 17:29." or rather, would have welcomed the disgrace, and said, "I will yet be more vile than thus! [1 Samuel 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.21)."

2. From a sense of **love to his fellow-creatures**.

Nothing is more gratifying to the saints than to see or hear what God has done for others. To them therefore David addresses himself. He speaks not to the ungodly; for that would be to "cast pearls before swine;" but to the godly he knew that the recital of his experience would be a rich source of comfort and encouragement. In another place he explicitly avows this very intention; and, for the promotion of that end, he gives a summary of the Lord's dealings with him during his long impenitence, and on the very first symptoms of penitence and contrition, [Psalm 32:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.3-6).

It is with a similar view that Paul also records his own wickedness in persecuting the Church of Christ; and displays the enormous unparalleled exercise of God's mercy towards him "the chief of sinners;" he declares, that this whole dispensation towards him was designed by God himself as a pattern for the encouragement of all penitents to the end of time! [1 Timothy 1:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13-16).

We then, if we "fear God," are the people invited to come and listen to the voice of David. In all that he has spoken on this subject, he has sought our good; for it was not to him as a prophet that this mercy was given, but as a saint, who feared God and wrought righteousness; and every one who in this respect resembles him, may hope to participate with him in his exalted privileges! Compare [Psalm 65:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.2) and [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24) and [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14) with [1 John 5:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.13-15).

As saints indeed we profess to have already enjoyed them in some measure; and therefore we are concerned to inquire,

III. How we may know whether **our**souls are partakers of the same benefit.

It is the privilege of all to have access to God, and to have their prayers answered by him; yes, and to know also that they have been answered. Of this we are assured on the authority of God himself.

But here the question arises: How shall these answers be clearly known to have come from God? Formerly God was pleased to make known to his people their interest in his favor by means which we are no longer to expect. He may indeed, if he see fit, still reveal his will to men by dreams and visions, by voices and signs—but we have no reason to think he either does, or will do so; and therefore we can place no confidence in any manifestations which are professedly derived from such sources.

We may also say that nothing certain can be known from any direct impressions of the Spirit of God upon the mind. We are far from affirming that no such impressions are ever made; for there can be no doubt but that God "sheds abroad his love in the hearts of his people," and gives them "a spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father!" and "by his Spirit witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of God," and even "seals them by the Holy Spirit of promise unto the day of redemption."

But still, as great and glorious as these operations of the Spirit are, they are not sufficient of themselves to prove that God has shown mercy to our souls; they must have the concurring evidence of good works resulting from them; the feelings themselves may be so closely imitated by Satan, that it shall be impossible for man certainly to distinguish between them. A person of a warm imagination and a confident mind may easily be wrought upon by that subtle spirit, so that he shall appear both to himself and others to be eminently distinguished by manifestations from God, while yet he is only under the influence of a Satanic delusion! The evidences whereby alone the work of God upon the soul can be satisfactorily ascertained are:

1. The exercise of gracious affections.

Love, joy, peace, with all the train of Christian virtues—are the fruits of God's Spirit alone. They cannot for any length of time be counterfeited; not even Satan himself can produce them. Hence we are told, by our blessed Lord, to look to them as the only certain marks and evidences whereby his people can be distinguished, "By their fruits you shall know them."

Would you then know for certain whether God has had mercy on your souls, and whether the supposed manifestations of God's love to your souls are genuine? Then see how the dispensation operates on your hearts and lives:  
if it leads you to a sense of lively gratitude to God,  
if it fills you with a determination to serve and glorify him with all your powers,  
if it encourages you to commit your every concern to his all-wise disposal, and  
if it stimulates you to seek by all possible means the welfare of your fellow-creatures  
—then you may confidently say, "He who has wrought us to the selfsame thing is God."

2. The radical mortification of sin.

David says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me! verse 18." To imagine therefore that we have received answers to prayer, while there is a sinful temper or disposition harbored in the heart, is a fatal delusion. Even the ungodly Jews, who set themselves in opposition to Christ, were fully convinced of this truth; for, imagining him to he a sinner, and taking occasion from thence to deny the miracle he had wrought, they said, "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if any man be a worshiper of God and does his will—then he hears him, [John 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.31)."

This then must be a point of diligent inquiry:

"Is sin in general dispossessed of its power over me?

Is my besetting sin in particular subdued and mortified?

Is my hatred to sin inveterate, uniform, and unreserved?" Unless this is our state, it is in vain that we pretend to have communion with God, and boast of our assured acceptance with him. If we are under the habitual influence of any one reigning lust of whatever kind—then we may make a great profession of religion, but we are hypocrites! We may make a noise about our piety, but "we are as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals."

In reference to this subject, we beg permission to offer some **advice**.

1. Be careful to notice the dealings of God with your souls.

Many set themselves against all kinds of Christian experience, and make even the very word, experience, a subject of continual ridicule and invective.

That injudicious people have given but too just ground of offence by their statements of their own feelings, must be confessed! But we must not therefore suppose that genuine religion has nothing to do with the feelings, and that it is a matter purely intellectual. Why should genuine religion alone have no influence on the heart, when it is calculated more than anything else to call into activity all the powers of our souls? Or why should that be called enthusiasm, which is deemed reasonable in all the common affairs of life? Let a man be embarked in anything that greatly involves his honor and interest throughout his life; a merchant in trade; a commander in war; a student in academic contests will he feel no concerns? will he have no fluctuations of mind, no alternations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow—according as his prospects brighten or are obscured? Will the outcome of his labors be to him such a matter of indifference, that he shall contemplate the probabilities of success or failure without any emotion?

If these diversified feelings are so called forth by things which pertain to this life, shall they have no scope for exercise in the things which relate to eternity? Call them by the name of Christian experience, or by any other name, they must have place in our souls; and if they have not, we are altogether dead in trespasses and sins!

Let every one then take notice how he is affected with his everlasting concerns; for he can never have obtained mercy, who has not sought for mercy; nor can he have received an answer to prayer, who never cried from his inmost soul to God. I must even go farther, and say that he has no hope—who never had a fear; nor shall he ever taste of joy—who has never been bowed down with penitential sorrow. As we deal with God, he will deal with us, "If we seek him—he will be found of us; but if we forsake him, he will forsake us."

2. Learn to estimate the dealings of God with our souls, by a right standard.

If we judge of our emotions by their intenseness, or by the degree of elevation or depression produced by them, we shall deceive our own souls. The votaries of false religions are sometimes transported beyond the bounds of reason, and are agitated even to madness. A mistaken course of religion too, will often operate very strongly on the mind, and leave us, after all, in a, state of spiritual death.

True religion is sober, discreet, practical. It consists in, or rather is inseparably connected with, "a spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind." It directs to Heaven; but does not lead us to neglect our earthly duties. It must be judged of by its practical effects. The grace that leaves us under the defilement of any "spiritual or fleshly filthiness," is not true grace. That alone comes from God, which leads to God; and that alone will have any saving efficacy, which assimilates us to "the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness."

3. Endeavor to improve the dealings of God with our souls for the good of others.

We are not proprietors of our talents, but stewards, to whom they are entrusted for the good of others. We must indeed be much on our guard against pride, and talkativeness, and a readiness to draw attention to ourselves, and to make self the topic of our conversation. A person of this complexion is a very hateful and disgusting character; and too many such, it must be confessed, there are in the religious world! But while we avoid such a spirit as this, we must delight to communicate to others the blessings we have received, and to encourage from our own experience a diligent and patient waiting upon God. It is obvious, that if we can say, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, and my hands have handled of the Word of life—that I declare unto you," our words will come with tenfold weight.

We repeat however, that a general communicating of our experiences in large companies is in our judgment highly inexpedient; it is a fruitful source of pride, discouragement, and hypocrisy.

But in the confidence of close friendship we may unbosom ourselves one to another, and declare, to the abundant edification both of ourselves and others, what God has done for our souls.

In seasons of temptation and spiritual trouble, we may by such a communication administer unspeakable comfort to an afflicted brother, 2 Corinthians 1:6. Nor is it necessary that we advert particularly to ourselves; if we give the result of our experience, the effect will be the same. The light we have received should not be hidden under a bushel basket; if we have "freely received, we should freely give."

#607

SIN A PREVENTIVE TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR PRAYERS

**[Psalm 66:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18-20)**

"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!"

The communion of saints is an exalted privilege; and "those who fear the Lord will speak often one to another" upon the subjects which are most interesting to their souls. To magnify the grace of God, and to encourage one another in the ways of holiness—will be delightful to them, and will tend exceedingly to their mutual improvement.

Hence David invited his pious brethren to hear the communications which he had to make on this all-important subject, "Come and hear, all you that fear God! and I will declare what he has done for my soul." Then he tells them of God's answers to his prayers; but at the same time informs them, that there was one condition only on which either they or he could hope for the acceptance of their prayers, namely, that they put away all sin without hesitation and without exception; for "if they regarded iniquity in their heart, the Lord would not hear them."

From the whole of this communication we see:

I. God's abhorrence of sin, when harbored and indulged.

"God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13);" though he tolerates sin in the world, he will sooner or later manifest his indignation against it. But in none does he abhor it more, than in those who profess themselves to be his people; according to what is written, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities! [Amos 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.2)."

God will not lend an ear to those who live in the commission of sin.

There are seasons when the most careless people will call upon God, "In the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us! [Jeremiah 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.27);" and "they will pour out a prayer when some heavy chastening is upon them, [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.16)." Not that they desire deliverance from sin; it is trouble alone that they are anxious to get rid of; and that removed, they return with pleasure to their former evil ways! Such were the Jews in the wilderness, "[Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-37) Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again. They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant, [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-37)."

But it is in vain for such hypocrites to hope that God will hear their prayers; for the very "sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord! [Proverbs 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.27);" and of this God has fully warned us. He has declared that "though they cry, he will not hear them, [Jeremiah 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 11.11);" yes, "though they cry in his ears, with a loud voice [Ezekiel 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 8.18)." Yes, "though they make many prayers, [Isaiah 1:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.12-15);" yes, though with their prayers "they fast, and offer burnt-offerings and oblations, [Jeremiah 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.12);" so far from listening to them, he will turn a deaf ear to their petitions, and even laugh at the calamities which they either feel or fear, [Proverbs 1:24-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-32).

He will recompense them according to their doings. In the day that he called to them, "they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear; and therefore, as he cried, and they would not hear—so when they cry, he will not hear, [Zechariah 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 7.11); [Zechariah 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 7.13)."

Even where sin is not openly indulged, but only harbored in the heart, God will resent it in this way.

Sin, however secret, is not hidden from him; for He sees it, under whatever form it may exist, and in the inmost recesses of the heart, "He searches the heart," and "weighs the spirits." Indeed, hypocrisy is not a whit less hateful to him than open sin.

Let us hear the testimony of holy Job, "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble comes upon him? [Job 27:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.8-9)." Even the most uninstructed of men, who had been born blind, and had had his eyes just recently opened, could say, "We know that God does not hear sinners, [John 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.31);" and so self-evident was that truth, that not one of his most subtle and malignant enemies could gainsay or resist it.

There is, in fact, a general conviction of it in the consciences of all, insomuch that God himself appealed to his hypocritical adversaries respecting it, "Shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you! [Ezekiel 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.3); [Ezekiel 20:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.31)." Whether "the idol" is in the house or "in the heart," it is equally hateful in the sight of God, who "requires truth in the inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6)," and will accept none but "those who worship him in spirit and in truth, [John 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.24)."

On the other hand, no language can express,

II. God's condescension to sinners who are truly upright before him.

David, though a sinner of no common stamp, was yet upright before God, as a penitent; for he bitterly bewailed his sins, and sought deliverance from them with his whole heart. There was no iniquity which he desired to hide from God, or to retain within his own bosom. Hence he found acceptance with God, and could bear testimony that God had heard and answered his petitions. And thus, wherever there is a true penitent, we are warranted to assure him:

1. That God will be merciful to his sins.

It is not sin lamented—but sin retained, or "regarded with delight in the heart," that will provoke God's indignation against us. A weeping sinner god will receive to mercy, "even though his sins may have been of a crimson or a scarlet dye." Never, from the foundation of the world, was one cast out who sought him with real penitence and faith.

Manasseh was, perhaps, of all men, the most criminal; yet was not even he rejected, when he truly humbled himself before the Lord his God, 2 Chronicles 33:12-13; [2 Chronicles 33:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.19). And we are authorized to assure the whole world, that if they seek the Lord with their whole hearts, "he will not turn away their prayer, nor his mercy from them;" on the contrary, "he will blot out their iniquities as a morning cloud," and "cast all their sins irrecoverably into the very depths of the sea!"

2. That he will be gracious to their prayers.

There is no need so great, but he will supply it; no concern so small, but he will take the charge of it, and order it for our good. We may go into his presence as to a loving Father, assured, that "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." Even the sigh, "the cry, the very breathing" of desire will be understood by him, and come up with acceptance before him, [Lamentations 3:55-56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.55-56); and, as in David's case, our prayers shall be turned into songs of praise and thanksgiving.

ADDRESS.

1. Beware of harboring any secret lust!

Sin is deceitful, and our treacherous hearts are ever ready to put a favorable construction upon it. But God can discern it, under whatever garb it may be disguised, and by whatever name it may be distinguished. It may be among "the things which are highly esteemed among men; but it will still be an abomination in the sight of God!" It may be something as dear to us as a right eye, or as necessary, in our apprehension, as a right hand; but it must be mortified, however painful the separation may be; for, if it is spared and retained, it will destroy both body and soul in Hell. I must entreat you, therefore, to examine carefully the state of your souls, and with the utmost diligence to "purge out the old leaven" that defiles them.

The Jews were accustomed, at the time of the Passover, to sweep their houses with extreme care, lest one atom of leaven should be left in any corner or recess; and this affords a good example to us in relation to our souls. Yet I would not have you rest satisfied with any endeavors of your own; but beg of God to search and try you, and to see if there be any wicked way in you, and to lead you in the way everlasting; for, as a single leak will sink a ship, so a single lust, unmortified and unsubdued, will sink the soul into everlasting perdition!

Oh, think with yourselves, how awful it will be in the last day to cry unto your God, and not be heard! to stand imploring him, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" and to receive for answer that terrible sentence, "Depart from me, you who wrought iniquity!" May God divert from all of you this fearful doom! and may you all be approved of him at last, as "Israelites indeed, in whom was no deceit!"

2. Improve, while you may, the manifold grace of God.

A throne of grace is now open to us; and "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." God assumes to himself the very title of "a God that hears prayer." And he bids us to open our mouths wide, that he may fill them. Moreover, "we have an Advocate with the Father, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself," "whom the Father hears always;" and who has so loved us, as to "give himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

O, what might we not receive, if only we were upright before God! for "the prayer of the upright is his delight." Suppose now at this time we had all been really praying to God, in the very spirit of the prayers which we have offered; what blessings would not be flowing down into our souls, even as "showers of blessings," as God himself has promised! Truly, if our eyes were opened to see what was passing, we would behold Almighty God taking loads of guilt from multitudes among us, and casting it all into the very depths of the sea. We would see the Holy Spirit resting on the heads of all, as on the day of Pentecost, for the purpose of enlightening, comforting, and sanctifying our souls. We would see angels ascending and descending upon us, in order to receive from God, and execute for us, their several commissions adapted to our necessities.

I do not hesitate to say, that, if we had all been as much in earnest in our prayers as our words have given reason to expect, this very place would resemble the temple of old, when the glory of God so filled it, that the priests could no longer abide there to minister before the Lord. Yes, our souls would be too full for humanity to sustain it.

Dear brethren, why should we not behold at least a measure of this sacred effusion, and taste a measure of this heavenly grace? God is willing to renew the Pentecostal scenes, if only we were in a state to receive them. It is in ourselves that we are straitened; we are not straitened in our God. He is as able as ever, yes, and as willing too, "to do exceeding abundantly for us, above all that we can ask or think." Truly, if we were even one half as earnest as we have professed to be, he would fill every hungry soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul, with his richest communications of grace and peace.

Let us arise and call upon our God; and let not "our prayer go forth out of feigned lips." And let us remember, for our comfort, that it is not the existence of sin in the soul that will prevent the acceptance of our prayers, (for who then would ever be heard?) but the indulgence of sin. Seek truly to have the whole body of sin mortified within you; seek to be "pure, as God is pure," and "holy, as God is holy." Then God will delight himself in you; and you, according to your measure, shall "be filled with all the fullness of your God!"

#608

CALLING OF THE GENTILES PRAYED FOR

**[Psalm 67:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 67.1-7)**

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. Selah May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him."

The general import of the Psalm is plain enough; but, in order to get a just view of the different expressions contained in it, we must place ourselves in the situation of David at the time he composed it. The Jewish Church and nation were a peculiar people, instructed in the knowledge of salvation, and living under the government of Jehovah. The righteous among them enjoyed the light of God's countenance, and looked forward to the possession of yet richer blessings under the reign of their Messiah. But the Gentile world were altogether ignorant of a Savior, and living without God in the world, under the tyranny of the prince of darkness, by whom they were led captive at his will. These two things then the Psalmist desired, namely:  
1. the advent of the Messiah to his own nation,  
2. and the manifestation of him to all the whole world.

The former of these events was prayed for in the beginning of the Psalm, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us" with the accomplishment of that promise, to which all your people are looking forward, the advent of the Messiah; and "cause your face to shine upon us," in the person of Him, who is "the brightness of your glory, and the express image of your person!"

The latter event however seems on this occasion to have chiefly occupied his mind; and the immediate exhibition of Christ to the Jews was desired, in order to his ulterior manifestation to the Gentile world, whom he longed to see partakers of all the privileges which he either enjoyed, or hoped for. He longed to see them brought into the way of truth and salvation, and subjected to the "righteous government" of the Messiah, and growing up before God in multitudes, "like the piles of grass upon the earth, verse 6 with [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.16). Compare [Isaiah 35:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.1-2); [Isaiah 55:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.12-13)."

This being the general subject of the Psalm, we shall proceed to notice some important instruction that is to be gathered from it. It shows us:

I. That there are rich blessings yet in store for the Gentiles.

The whole Psalm might with great propriety be read in the future tense, as a prophecy. In the two concluding verses of the Psalm it is so read in our translation; and it might have been so read throughout. And in that view, how singularly striking is it! how strong and numerous the assertions that such an event shall take place! At present indeed there seems to be but little prospect of so glorious an event; but we are well assured it shall come, and that too at no distant period.

Indeed in part it is already come; for who are we but Gentiles? By the preaching of the Apostles, myriads were converted to the faith of Christ; and myriads are yet monuments of his power and grace.

But this is only the first-fruits; we expect a harvest, when "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." We believe that the day is coming when "all the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord their God;" "they shall fear the Lord their God, and David their king! [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5)." "The way" of salvation through a crucified Redeemer "shall then be known among them," and "the saving health" of the Gospel be then imparted to those who are now dying in their sins. The bond-slaves of sin and Satan shall then cast off the yoke of their oppressor, and yield themselves willing subjects to the Prince of Peace. In a word, those who have hitherto known no pleasure but in the indulgence of their lusts, shall "be glad in the Lord, and sing praise to his name," and "rejoice in him" as their God forever and ever. Glorious period! May "God hasten it in his time!"

It further shows us,

II. What a union there is between piety and philanthropy.

The Jews were represented by their enemies as haters of mankind. But this was in no respect applicable to the godly among them. What could exceed the love of David towards the Gentile world? We cannot conceive greater earnestness than is expressed for their welfare in this Psalm. David seems scarcely to think that he himself is blessed, while the Gentile world remain destitute of any share in his blessings. This philanthropy was the fruit of his piety; and wherever true piety exists, it will show itself in a concern for those who are afar off from God, and perishing in their sins. All piety that is devoid of charity, is a mere name, a phantom, a delusion. "If," says an inspired Apostle, "we see our brother have need, and shut up our affections of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in us?" And if this be true in relation to his temporal needs, how much more is it respecting the needs of his soul!

We wish all then to judge of their piety by this touchstone; see what measure of compassion you have to your perishing fellow-creatures; see what pleasure you have in contemplating the future accession of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ; what efforts you make to promote it; and what earnestness you have when praying for it at a throne of grace. These things will lead you into a considerable degree of self-knowledge; for be assured you know but little of the saving efficacy of Christ's blood, or the sanctifying efficacy of his grace, if you are not longing and laboring to bring others to a participation of your blessings.

We may further learn,

III. What encouragement we have for missionary exertions.

If nothing had been spoken in the Scriptures respecting the conversion of the heathen, we might well sit down in despair and say, It is in vain to attempt so hopeless a work. But when we look into the Scriptures and see how continually this subject is brought forward, and with what confidence it is declared, we should make no account of difficulties, since "with God all things are possible." Ezekiel might have objected to the commission given to him to preach to dry bones; but he knew that dry bones could live, if God should be pleased to breathe life into them, [Ezekiel 37:1-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.1-14). Thus may we engage in missionary labors, assured that God will fulfill his own word, and crown our endeavors with success. Indeed the time for the full accomplishment of his promise seems fast approaching; and "the fields appear already, as it were, white unto the harvest." Methinks the heathen in divers countries are saying to us, not by their necessities only, but by their express desires, "Come over to us and help us!" And shall we be backward to impart the knowledge with which we are so highly favored, and the salvation which we profess to glory in? It is obvious enough, that they cannot learn unless they be taught, "nor can they hear, without a preacher."

Do not let difficulties then dismay us; but let us go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and look to him to accompany his Word with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven; then may we hope that Satan's empire shall be destroyed, and that the promised kingdom of our Redeemer shall be established on its ruins.

#609

THE END OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION

**[Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18)**

"When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious—that you, O LORD God, might dwell there!"

While some give an unbounded scope to their imagination, and view Christ in almost every passage of the Scriptures, others run into a contrary extreme, and scarcely behold him even in the most express prophecies. But there certainly are many parts of the prophetic writings, and particularly of the Psalms, which, to whoever they relate in a literal sense, have a spiritual or mystical reference to Christ; nor can we err in interpreting them of him, while we take the inspired Apostles for our guides.

David, having vanquished all his enemies, determined to provide a fixed residence for the ark of God, that God might dwell in the midst of his people at Jerusalem. And he penned this Psalm to be used on that occasion.

It is thought that verses 1-6 were sung when the ark was taken up by the Levites.

Verses 7-14 were sung when they were on their way to the hill, until they came in sight of it.

Verses 15-17 were sung when they were ascending the hill.

Verse 18-23 were sung when when the ark was deposited.

But Paul informs us that there was a further reference in it to the ascension of Christ; who, being the true ark whereon the glory rested, went, after having triumphed over all his enemies, to his fixed abode in Heaven; and, having received gifts as the fruits of his victories, gave them unto men, and provided that God should have a stated residence in his Church, [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8). The Apostle, in citing the Psalmist's words, makes a slight alteration in them; instead of "received gifts for," he puts "gave gifts to." But the truth contained in them is the same; for Christ received gifts for men in order that he might give them to men.

With this inspired commentary, we may proceed with confidence to consider,

I. The **manner** of Christ's ascension.

Christ, having submitted to the deepest humiliation, was now to receive a proportionable advancement, which, having already been begun in his resurrection, was now perfected in his ascension.

1. This was **glorious**.

In verse 17 the glory of it is described, and it is compared with the descent of Jehovah on Mount Sinai. While he was in the very act of blessing his disciples, [Luke 24:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.51), he was taken up by a cloud, as Elijah was in his fiery chariot, to Heaven. Instantly myriads of the heavenly host surrounded him with their acclamations and hosannas. They had surveyed him with astonishment from the first moment that he came into the world. When he yet lay in the manger, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" But, when they beheld him agonizing in the garden, and expiring on the cross, we may almost conceive their songs of joy to have been turned into weeping and lamentation.

We doubt not, however, but at this time their joy exceeded all that they had ever felt from their first creation. They now saw their Creator and their God, who had so long veiled himself in human flesh, ascending to his bright abodes, to display his glory in a light infinitely surpassing all that they had ever seen before. What must his redeemed people also have felt the very instant that he entered the portals of Heaven! With what rapture and ecstasies must they have been filled! But our imagination cannot grasp the thought. We must be in Heaven ourselves before we can form the smallest idea of their felicity.

Suffice it then to say with the angelic messengers, that, as he ascended up into Heaven, so will he speedily come again from Heaven; and that in the meantime, instead of gazing with unprofitable curiosity, we must look for his blessings, and devote ourselves to his service, [Acts 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.10-11).

2. This was **triumphant**.

In his death he seemed vanquished; but in reality he overcame; and in his ascension he led captive all his enemies and ours.

*Sin* had diffused its poison through all the descendants of Adam, and had infected all their powers both of body and soul. But Christ, having expiated its guilt, now rescued many vassals from its power.

Satan, the god of this world, who had hitherto usurped dominion and led men captive at his will, now "fell from Heaven like lightning;" and his throne, shaken to its foundations, was demolished!

Death also, that had reigned over all, now was vanquished in its turn; for Jesus "burst its bands." "By death, he destroyed death, and him who had the power of death, that is, the devil! [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14);" and now, as a mighty conqueror, that had "spoiled principalities and powers, he triumphed over them openly! [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)," and led them captive at his chariot wheels.

From contemplating the manner of his ascension, let us proceed to consider:

II. The **ends** of Christ's ascension.

There were some ends that respected Christ himself, namely, that he might receive his reward, and carry on his work within the veil; but we must confine ourselves to those which respect the Church.

1. The **immediate** end of Christ's ascension.

As Jesus died, so he rose and ascended in a public capacity, as our mediator with God, He had purchased blessings for us; and he now went to receive them at his Father's hands, that he might impart them to us. He was henceforth to have all fullness treasured up in himself, that we might receive out of it according to our necessities. He ascended, "that he might fill all things," and "impart repentance and remission of sins," together with all the gifts and graces of his Spirit, to his chosen people. That this was the immediate end of his ascension, appears not only from his own predictions respecting it [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7), but from the express declaration of the apostles on the descent of the Holy Spirit [Acts 2:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.33). Yet it was not for those only who were waiting for redemption, but even "for the rebellious also," that he received gifts; as he abundantly testified in the conversion of his murderers; and as he is ready to testify in the conversion of us also.

2. The **remote** end of Christ's ascension.

It was the privilege of the Jewish Church to have the symbols of God's presence in their temple. But it is our privilege to have God himself both with us, and in us, He will make our hearts his habitation; he will dwell in us, and cause his glory to fill our souls. This was a further end of Christ's ascension, as he himself tells us, "I will pray the Father for you; and he will send you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever, etc; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you, [John 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16-17)." Even the most rebellious heart, that has defied the Majesty of Heaven, and despised hitherto all overtures of mercy, may yet be encouraged to look up to him; and the soul that has been filled with all iniquity may yet become the temple of the living God. Other conquerors, in the day of their triumph, have scattered largesses among their admiring followers; but this greatest of all gifts will Jesus bestow on his most inveterate enemies; let them only repent, and call upon his name, and he will give them all the riches both of grace and glory.

Improvement.

1. Let none despair of **mercy**.

We might have well supposed, that the ascension of Jesus would rather have been for the inflicting of judgments on his enemies; yet, behold, it was for the express purpose of exercising mercy. Let us not proudly deny that we are rebels; but, humbling ourselves before him as the chief of sinners, let us desire him to display the exceeding riches of his grace in his mercy towards us.

2. Let none despair of **victory**.

Conflicts we must have, as long as we continue in the body; but in the very midst of them we may say, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Does sin harass and defile us? Christ says, "It shall never have dominion over us." Does Satan seek to deceive or devour us? His head was bruised by Christ, and "he shall soon be bruised under our feet also." Does death alarm us? Its sting is drawn; it is "swallowed up in victory;" it is among our richest treasures, [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22). Let us view Christ leading them all captive in his ascension; and know that, through Him, we also shall be more than conquerors.

#610

GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR HIS BENEFITS

**[Psalm 68:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.19-20)**

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, even the God of our salvation! He who is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death."

THE service of God is beneficial to the soul, not merely as bringing down a divine blessing upon us, but in that it prepares and attunes the soul for further services. David had been carrying up the ark to Jerusalem, to place it in the sanctuary on Mount Zion. And now, having already celebrated the praises of Jehovah for his dealings with his people in former ages, and for the present ceremony, as typical of the Messiah's exaltation after he should have completed his work on earth; and having deposited the ark in its proper place; he bursts forth into general acknowledgments of God's mercies to his people, and devout ascriptions of praise to him, for all the wonders of his love.

Now we, brethren, have been engaged in the holy service of worshiping our God. But shall we be satisfied with that? No; I would have that service to be a preparation for a still further honoring of God, while we contemplate with devoutest admiration,

I. The blessings with which he has loaded us.

And here I might expatiate on the temporal benefits which are poured out upon us daily, in the richest abundance; I might enumerate the various comforts that are ministered to us, in all the works both of creation and providence. But the inspired comment which we have on this passage leads our mind to far higher benefits, even to all the blessings of redemption. Paul quotes the words before my text, and declares them to have been fulfilled in the ascension of our blessed Lord and Savior, and in his bestowment of spiritual blessings on his Church, [Ephesians 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.7-8); [Ephesians 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.11-13).

Let us contemplate, then:

1. The ordinances of God's grace.

This is the first thing mentioned by Paul in the passage to which I have referred, "He gave gifts unto men; he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." And is this benefit confined to the apostolic age? If we have not Prophets and Apostles, have we not pastors and teachers? And if we see not thousands converted at a time, do we not still see the Church augmented and edified in the midst of us? Yes; we have the same doctrines preached to us as were delivered in the days of old, and the same blessed effects produced by them; and it befits us to be duly sensible of this mercy, and to bless our God for it from our inmost souls.

2. The gift of God's Spirit.

This, you know, was the immediate consequence of our Lord's ascension; he poured out his Spirit both on his disciples and on his enemies, on the day of Pentecost; for the instruction of the one, and the conversion of the other. And though we no longer have the Holy Spirit in his miraculous powers, have we not still his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting energies experienced among us? Many, I trust, who are here present, can attest, that the Spirit still accompanies the Word, and makes it "sharper than any two-edged sword," and effectual for the ends for which God, in his tender mercy, has sent it, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11). Even where it has not yet wrought for the conversion of the soul, it has, in ten thousand instances, striven with us, to bring us to repentance. Perhaps, among us all, there is not one who has not felt his motions within him, and heard his gracious whispers, saying, "Repent, and turn unto your God." For this, then, we have also reason to adore our God; for, next to the gift of God's only dear Son to die for us, is the gift of his Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and to impart unto us all the blessings of salvation.

3. The knowledge of God's Son.

This has God richly imparted to our souls. Say, brethren, has not "the Lord Jesus Christ been evidently set forth crucified among you?" You yourselves will bear us witness, that from the very beginning of our ministry we "determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The dignity of his person, the nature of his work, the suitableness of his offices, the freeness and fullness of his salvation, have been ever exhibited to your view, in order that you might believe in him, and, "believing, might have life through his name." This knowledge, in Paul's estimation, infinitely exceeded every other; yes, in comparison with it he regarded "all other things as dross and dung." Yet is this bestowed on you, in all its clearest evidence, and in all its sanctifying and saving operations.

4. The hope of God's glory.

By the Gospel which you hear, not only are life and immortality brought to fight, but they are brought home to your souls as actually attained in Christ Jesus. He is your Forerunner; he is gone to prepare a place for you; and, if only you truly believe in him, you may survey all the glory of Heaven, and claim it as your own; for his throne is your throne, his kingdom your kingdom, his glory your glory, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21). [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29). [John 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.22). This is "the inheritance to which you are begotten; and for which, by the almighty power of God, you are reserved, [1 Peter 1:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-5)."

These are some of the benefits with which you are loaded from day to day. Say whether you have not reason to bless God for them, and from your inmost souls to say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, [Ephesians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.3)."

But, from the gifts, let us, in our contemplations, rise to,

II. The Author and Giver of them all.

He is here described by,

1. His proper character.

We must not forget that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who ascended to Heaven, and who bestows these gifts upon men. In the Scriptures he is continually called "a Savior;" but here he is repeatedly, and with very peculiar emphasis, called "the God of salvation;" "He who is our God. is the God of salvation." Now I conceive that, by this appellation, David designed to characterize the Lord Jesus as possessing in himself all the fullness that was necessary for our salvation, and as imparting every distinct blessing with as much zeal and love as if that were the only blessing which he was qualified to bestow. In our unconverted state, we need from God all imaginable patience and forbearance; and, for our comfort, he is declared to be "the God of patience, [Romans 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.5)." To turn us completely unto him, we need an abundance of every kind of grace; and he is "the God of all grace, [1 Peter 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.10)." In returning to God, we hope to obtain peace; and he is "the God of peace, [Hebrews 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20)." As the ultimate end of our conversion, we hope to obtain glory; and he is "the God of glory, [Acts 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.2)." We cannot conceive of anything which we stand in need of, in order to our complete salvation, but there is all fullness of it treasured up for us in Christ Jesus; and of that fullness we may all receive to the utmost possible extent of our necessities. In truth, the benefits we do receive are only the emanations of love from him, even as the rays of light which every moment proceed from the sun; and if any possess them not, it is not owing to any lack of liberality in God, but because they foolishly and wickedly bar their hearts against the admission of his gifts. Ascend then, brethren, from the gifts to the Giver, and from the streams to the Fountain-head, and see what a fullness there is in him for all the sinners of mankind! and, from blessing your God and Savior on account of what he has imparted to you, learn to adore and magnify him for what he is in himself, even on account of his own proper character, as "the God of salvation."

2. His peculiar office.

"Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." And is this also spoken of the Lord Jesus? Hear what Jesus himself, after his ascension, said to the Apostle John, "Do not fear; I am the first and the last; I am he who lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hell and of death, [Revelation 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.17-18)." He who is the God of salvation has a perfect control over every enemy; so that none can assault us without his special permission; nor can all the powers of darkness prevail over the least or the lowest of his people. "He opens, and no man shuts; and he shuts, and no man opens." Satan could not assault Job, or even enter into the herd of swine, before he had obtained permission from the Lord; nor can he now prevail to injure us, either in body or in soul, any farther than our infinitely wise and gracious God sees fit to permit. Our Lord has assured us, not only, "that no weapon which is formed against us shall prosper, but that the smith himself, who forms the weapon, derives his very existence from him, and exists alone by his power. Consequently, we have none to fear; and "every tongue, whether of men or devils, that shall rise against us in judgment, we shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord, [Isaiah 54:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.16-17)."

Contemplate, I beg you, this glorious and all-sufficient Savior; and there will be no end to your praises, no limit to your adorations and thanksgivings.

See, brethren, from hence,

1. What is the proper employment of a saint on earth.

The ignorant and ungodly world are mostly occupied in ruminating on their troubles, and in casting reflections upon those who are the authors of them. But how much sweeter employment have you, my brethren! You are surveying your blessings, and almost groaning under the load with which your grateful mind is overwhelmed and oppressed; and, at the same time, you are adoring your Benefactor, and giving him the glory due unto his name. This is a sweet employment. This is worthy of a redeemed soul. O let it be your occupation day and night! and let the incessant language of your hearts be, "Bless the Lord, O my soul! and let all that is within me bless his holy name."

2. What a preparation the Christian's services in this world are for his enjoyments in the world to come!

What are they doing in Heaven? Truly, they have no other employment than this. to recount all the mercies which they have received at God's hands; and to adore him for all the perfections of his nature, and for all the wonders of his grace. Conceive of a soul just entering into that world of bliss; hear all its acknowledgments; listen to its songs of praise; follow it through all the courts of Heaven, and watch it day and night; and you will see, beyond a doubt, that grace is glory begun, and glory is grace consummated.

#611

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

**[Psalm 68:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.35)**

"The God of Israel is he who gives strength and power unto his people; blessed be God!"

The consideration of God's power is to his enemies awful in the extreme; but to his friends it affords the richest consolation. The immediate subject of the Psalm before us is the carrying up of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion; but the power of God in destroying his enemies, and saving his friends, is celebrated throughout in terms of exultation and triumph. In the words of our text this interesting topic is summed up in few words, and concluded with an expression of adoration, well suited to the subject.

We propose to consider,

I. The description here given of God.

Though at first sight this description of the Divine character does not appear very peculiar—yet, if it is attentively considered, it will be found:

1. Most **glorious**.

It imports, in the first place, that God does give strength and power to his people; and this is proved by all the sacred annals; yes, by daily experience. He has enabled his people of old to resist the greatest temptations, [Genesis 39:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.10-12), to perform the hardest duties, [Genesis 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.2); [Genesis 22:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.9-10), to endure the heaviest afflictions, [Hebrews 11:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.36-37), to triumph over the united assaults of earth and Hell, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. And many can say at this day, "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, [Psalm 48:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 48.8)."

It intimates yet further, that none but God can give strength to his people. The mode of expression in the text strongly intimates this. What could the gods of the heathen do for their votaries? God tells them that their senseless idols could not so much as move; they must themselves be carried, [Isaiah 46:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.1-2); [Isaiah 46:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.6-7). And as for human confidences, they were also vain; neither the Assyrian, nor Egyptian, nor any other power, could deliver those who trusted in them, [Isaiah 30:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.1-7). It was the prerogative of Jehovah alone to afford his people the supports they stood in need of [Psalm 62:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.11).

But the full meaning of the text seems to be, that God delights in supplying his people's needs; it is that very character in which he most glories, and by which he most wishes to be known. He is always looking out for opportunities of exercising his power on behalf of his people, 2 Chronicles 16:9; and rejoices in every occasion that their necessities afford him of making known to them his power and grace, [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.41).

2. Most **endearing**.

If a person be advancing with a full tide of spiritual prosperity, how can he fail of loving the great Author of all his happiness? Surely every exercise of divine power that he has ever experienced, must render this attribute of God precious to his soul, while he beholds the dangers he has escaped, and the difficulties he has overcome.

To a person weak and drooping, this view of God must be still more delightful. How must he check his unbelieving fears; and say, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? Hope you in God, [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)."

Above all, must this description of God be precious to the poor. They are incapable of entering into abstract views of the Divine perfections; but this representation of God they are as capable of comprehending, as the most learned upon earth can be; yes; he knows both the existence, and the omnipotence, of God, as much from his own inward experience, as he can possibly do from the visible creation; because he feels himself to be a living witness of them.

In order to call forth the practical ends of this description, let us consider,

II. The opinions it should excite in us.

If the concluding words of our text be understood as referring to the past, they are an expression of gratitude to God; if as relating to the future, they denote a cheerful trust in him. We may properly take them in both of these senses, and learn from them to exercise,

1. Gratitude.

While a sense of our own weakness humbles us in the dust, a view of God's power, and a recollection of the experience we have had of his kindness and all-sufficiency, should kindle in our bosoms the liveliest gratitude. Who can "look to the rock whence he has been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence he has been dug, [Isaiah 51:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.1-2)," and not bless the name of his God? Who can behold the manner in which others are enslaved by sin and Satan, and not adore the God that has made him free? So deeply was David impressed with the mercies he had received, that he not only called on his soul to bless God, but declared that "all his bones should praise him, [Psalm 35:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.9-10)." And the one inquiry of our hearts should be, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me, [Psalm 116:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12); [Psalm 103:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-2)."

2. Trust.

The attributes of God in general may well encourage us to trust in him; but his power, together with his disposition to exercise it on our behalf, should lead us to place in him the most unbounded confidence. Difficulties should all vanish, and appear as nothing, when we reflect on him who is engaged for us. The same power that "made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over, [Isaiah 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10)," can smooth all obstructions in our way, [Isaiah 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.4), and make our mountains to become a plain, [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7). We therefore should trust all our concerns in his hands, [Proverbs 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.3), with an assured hope that we shall never be confounded, [Psalm 125:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1-2).

INFERENCES.

1. How little ground is there for the excuses of the presumptuous!

You are ready to vindicate your ungodly ways, by saying, "I cannot live as God requires." But is not God able, yes, and willing too, to assist you? And if you will not seek his assistance, does not the blame rest wholly with yourselves? Know that, however you may justify yourselves now, there is a day coming when you will stand speechless before him.

2. How little ground is there for the fears of the desponding?

We are but too apt to faint in difficulties, and to think them insurmountable; but if we would habituate ourselves more to look at the power of God, we should proceed with confidence and courage. "Let the weak then say, I am strong." Let them "know in whom they have believed, that He is able to keep that which they have committed to him! [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

#612

SORROWS AND SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

**[Psalm 69:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.1-4)**

"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. I am forced to restore what I did not steal."

Sacred are the prayers of a penitent, and hallowed is the sanctuary where he is pouring out his soul before God; nor could the most obdurate sinner overhear:

His confessions and supplications,

His cries and tears,

His importunate pleadings and heart-rending groans—without being filled with awe and reverence.

Let us draw near then with holy awe to the recesses of that chamber, where, not a sinful creature like ourselves, but our incarnate God, the sin-atoning savior, is pouring out his soul under a load of sins imputed to him, and of sorrows for the punishment of our sin, "during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7). He it is that in the Psalm before us is saying, "Save me, O God! For the waters are come in unto my soul."

David, it is true, was the writer of the Psalm; and in parts of it may be considered as speaking chiefly, if not entirely, of himself; but in other parts he speaks so entirely in the person of the messiah whom he typified, that we can scarcely apply the words to any other. Nor while we assert this are we in any danger of erring; because our blessed Lord himself, and the evangelists who wrote his life, and Paul also, all concur in putting this very construction upon the Psalm, and in citing various parts of it as actually accomplished in Christ.

"Zeal for your house has consumed me, [John 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.17)," is applied to Christ on one occasion; and on another, "they hated me without a cause, [John 15:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.25)." His general deportment is said to have been predicted in those words, "the reproaches of those who reproached you, fell on me! [Romans 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.3)." At his crucifixion was fulfilled that remarkable prophecy, "they put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst! [Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.21); [John 19:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.29)." Even to Judas who betrayed him is one portion of it applied, "let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein, [Acts 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.20)." After such authorities as these, we do not hesitate to interpret our text as referring to the sufferings of Christ, and as describing,

I. The overwhelming nature of Christ's sufferings.

If David, as a type, had many things to suffer, much more had that savior whom he typified. We will not however speak of his sufferings during the whole period of his sojourning on earth; but of those only which he endured in the closing scenes of his life, and which seem more particularly referred to in the Psalm before us. That we may have a more distinct new of them, we will notice,

1. Those sufferings which were **previous to Christ's arrest**.

"He had indeed a fearful prospect before him," a bloody "baptism to be baptized with; and how was he straitened until it should be accomplished, [Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50)." When the time for its accomplishment drew near, his "soul was so troubled, that he knew not what to say." As a man, he felt disposed to deprecate his sufferings, and to be saved from that hour that was fast approaching; but, as our mediator, he would not recede, because he had come into the world for the express purpose of suffering all that was due to our sins, [John 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27) with [John 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.23); [John 12:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32-33).

In the garden of gethsemane his sorrows came yet more heavily upon him, so that he cried, "my soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death! [Matthew 26:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.37-38)." On this occasion he cried repeatedly, "o my father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me! [Matthew 26:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.39); [Matthew 26:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.44)." And such was the agony of his soul, that "he sweat great drops of blood" from every pore of his body, [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.44). To this period in particular we may suppose the petitions in our text to refer; for then "he offered up his supplications with strong crying and tears, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7);" and such were the intenseness of his agony, and the ardor of his importunity, that "his throat was dried," "his eyes failed," his whole nature was exhausted, verse 3, and he needed "an angel to be sent from Heaven to strengthen him, [Luke 22:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.43)."

It must be remembered, that in all this time no man had approached to hurt him; and therefore we are sure that his sorrows proceeded from "the powers of darkness" who were now let loose upon him, [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.53), and from the hand of God himself, who now concurred to inflict upon him, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10), the curse due to our iniquities, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13), which by a covenant-engagement he had undertaken to sustain, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8).

2. Those sufferings which Christ sustained **during his trial**.

It was no slight aggravation of his troubles that he was betrayed into the hands of his murderers by a kiss from one of his own disciples, and that "one who had eaten bread with him lifted up his heel against him, [John 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.18)."

And when he was seized and bound, he was yet further wounded in his soul by the intemperate zeal of another of his disciples, who, instead of submitting with meekness to the will of God, sought to destroy the adversaries of his Lord, [Matthew 26:51-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.51-52).

From the garden he was hurried to the palace of the high priest, and, subsequently, from one tribunal to another, only to be treated with all manner of indignities, and to be denied that justice which his judges pretended to administer. How inconceivably painful to his mind must it have been, to be arrayed in mock majesty, to be made an object of profane scoffing, to be smitten, and buffeted, and spit upon, and loaded with all manner of accusations, and all this time not to have so much as one of the many myriads whom he had healed to bear testimony in his favor, verse 20; yes, even his own disciples having forsaken him, one indeed excepted, whose presence only aggravated his sorrow, by his impious oaths, and pertinacious denial of his Lord.

Even a measure that was adopted with a view to preserve his life, became a source of still more aggravated woe. Pilate hoped, that, by scourging him, he should pacify those who sought his life; and, the order being given, "the ploughers ploughed upon his back and made long their furrows, [Psalm 129:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.3)," but "the whole multitude with insatiate fury cried out, crucify him! Crucify him! See verse 4," and demanded that barabbas, who was a robber and a murderer, should be preferred before him. Thus was the immaculate lamb of God condemned to suffer the most cruel and ignominious of all deaths, even the accursed death of the cross!

3. Those sufferings which were consummated in Christ's **death**. From his trial before Pilate, Jesus was dragged away to execution. Laden with the cross to which he was to be affixed, he sank under the load, which therefore another was compelled to bear to the place of execution. To this he was fastened with nails through his hands and feet; and then was he raised as a naked bloody spectacle to all his enemies.

Ah! With what taunts was he then assailed, assailed even by the thieves, who on either side of him were suffering the same punishment! One would have thought that in such a situation at least, he might become an object of pity; but no pity was found in the hearts of his blood-thirsty enemies; and their professed readiness to assuage his anguish, was only an impious mockery, and a cruel insult; they gave him "gall and vinegar to drink!" [Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.21).

But the heaviest load which Jesus had to sustain, was laid upon him by other hands than those of man, even by the hands of his heavenly father. Man could only touch his body; the wounds inflicted on his soul proceeded immediately from God, who then "was pleased to bruise him," and to punish in him for the iniquities of his people. All his other sufferings he endured with lamb-like silence; but this forced from him that heart-rending cry, "my God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

The darkness which at mid-day, for the space of three hours, veiled the whole land, was a sad emblem of his state, under the agonies of expiring nature, and the wrath of a sin-avenging God! At last, having drunk the very last dregs of that cup of wrath which had been put into his hands, he bows his head, and gives up the spirit. "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow? [Lamentations 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 1.12)."

After this slight sketch of our redeemer's sufferings, let us proceed to consider,

II. Our redeemer's sufferings were vicarious.

It might be said of David under many of his persecutions, that "he restored that which he took not away;" for certainly he exercised forbearance, and forgiveness, and a returning of good to a very extraordinary extent. But a greater than David is here. That glorious person whose sufferings we have been contemplating, suffered not for himself, but for us, "he was cut off, but not for himself! [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26)."

1. Our redeemer's sufferings were not for his own sins.

He was pure and perfect. His very examinations proved that in this respect he was fit to be an offering for the sins of others, "a lamb without blemish, and without spot." As he had before challenged his enemies, "which of you convinces me of sin?" so the more they labored to load him with guilt, the more clear and manifest his innocence appeared. His judge, his fellow-sufferer, his executioner, all proclaimed him innocent. The reason of his death, and his fitness for it, are stated in few words by his beloved disciple, "he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin."

2. Our redeemer's sufferings were for the sins of his people.

In all that he endured, he was our substitute and surety. We had contracted the debt, which he paid; we had sold our inheritance, which he shed his blood to redeem. This is the account given us throughout the whole scriptures. His sacrifice was prefigured by all the sacrifices under the levitical law, which in expiating the sins of those who offered them, and in restoring sinners to the favor of their God, might be said to "restore that which they took not away." But this use of his sufferings is not left to be gathered from types and shadows; it was declared by the prophets in the most express terms. "He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4)," yes, "he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. The Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all, [Isaiah 53:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5-6)."

To the same effect speak his apostles also. Paul says, that "he who knew no sin was made sin, that is, a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21)." And Peter tells us, that "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "suffered for sins, the just for (in the place of) the unjust, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24); [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18)."

This glorious mystery may be fitly illustrated by Paul's conduct towards the penitent Onesimus. Onesimus had robbed his master philemon. After his conversion by the ministry of Paul, the apostle sought to restore him to the love and confidence of his master; and engaged for that end to replace from his own funds the money that onesimus had stolen, "if he has wronged you, or owes you ought, charge that on my account. I Paul have written it with my own hand, I will repay it, Philemon verse 18, 19." Thus did the Lord Jesus Christ, while yet he was in the bosom of his father, undertake for us; and thus in due time he "laid down his own life as a ransom for us."

What an instructive mystery is this! We see in it,

1. The proper ground for **faith**.

To what, or to whom, shall we look to reconcile us to God? Can we "restore what we have taken way?" or will anyone else undertake to restore it for us? What compensation can we make for our violations of God's law? What offering can we make, that shall satisfy the claims of divine justice? Or what can we do to compensate for the glory of which we have robbed our God? Alas! To make the attempt, or entertain the thought, were vain in the extreme.

But Jesus has by his own obedience unto death made full satisfaction for all our sins. Have we poured contempt upon the law? He "has magnified the law, and made it honorable! [Isaiah 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.21)." Have we brought dishonor on our God? He has glorified every one of the divine perfections more, infinitely more, by his obedience unto death—than they ever could have been glorified either by the perfect obedience, or the eternal condemnation, of the whole human race! [John 13:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.31).

He then is worthy to be confided in as a savior; he is a sure foundation whereon to build all our hopes for time and for eternity! Hence he says, (and may God give to every one of us grace to comply with the invitation!) "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)."

2. The strongest motive for **love**.

What shall induce us to love the savior, if the contemplation of his vicarious sufferings will not? Can we think of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich—yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9);" can we think of this, I say, and not have our souls inflamed with love and gratitude to him? Surely such love must constrain us to admire him, to adore him, to magnify him, to serve him with all our faculties and all our abilities. The very stones would cry out against us, if we did not break forth, as it were, in continual hosannas to our adorable benefactor.

3. The safest rule for **obedience**.

We must expect to be, in a greater or less degree, conformed to our savior in his sufferings—if ever we would be conformed to him in his glory. From men we must expect persecutions for his sake. From Satan we shall meet with the same violent assaults. From God himself too must we occasionally experience the hidings of his face, and the chastisements of his rod; for, "what son is there whom the father chastens not?"

But in our troubles we must imitate our blessed Lord, and spread them before our heavenly father "with strong crying and tears." The proper language for us is that which was used by him in verses 13-18; and, as far as our afflictions proceed from men, we must meet them with patience and resignation, or rather, I should say, with returns of kindness and love. We should be ready to "restore that which we took not away," and to render good for evil, until we have "overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.20-21)." Doubtless this is a difficult and arduous task; but it is one which will be richly recompensed in the performance of it, and will be highly approved of our God in the last day, [Matthew 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.14). We may indeed, notwithstanding such conduct, be constrained to "pass through deep waters;" but our God will be with us in the midst of them! [Isaiah 43:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2), and bring us through all our tribulations to a state of eternal blessedness and glory! [Revelation 7:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-15).

#613

HUMBLE SOULS ENCOURAGED

**[Psalm 69:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.32-33)**

"The humble shall see this and be glad; and you who seek God, your hearts shall live. For the Lord hears the poor, and does not despise his prisoners."

Sweetly encouraging are the records of God's people as contained in the sacred oracles. We see their complaints exactly agreeing with those which we ourselves are constrained to utter. We see:  
with what confidence they betook themselves to prayer,  
and how wonderfully their efforts were crowned with success,  
and how pleased God himself was with magnifying his grace and mercy towards them  
—and from all this we derive encouragement, at once suited to our necessities, and sufficient for our needs.

Behold the experience of David in the preceding context, "I am poor and sorrowful." (In the same way, his experience accords with what is felt by every contrite soul.) and to what has David recourse? To prayer; and with an enlargement of heart which we should scarcely have expected to see, "let your salvation, O God, set me up on high!" in the same way, it is thus that we also should pray; not being straitened in our petitions; but "opening our mouths wide, in order that they may be filled."

And now mark the success of David's prayer; behold, without the delay of a moment, he is enabled to add, "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving." (Such is the success which we also may hope for, if we pray in humility and faith.) and was God displeased with this holy boldness? No! David adds, "this also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that has horns and hoofs," yes, better than the cattle upon a thousand hills.

Now mark the improvement we are to make of this, "the humble shall see this, and be glad; and (whoever you are) your heart shall live who seek God; for the Lord hears the needy (wherever they may be found), and despises not his prisoners," however low or abject their condition.

Now, to encourage you, my brethren, from this example, I will proceed (in the simplest way imaginable, and not with any artificial arrangement), to address you on the subject before us:

I trust that many of you are "seeking after God".

It can scarcely be, that after having so long had the gospel faithfully ministered unto you, there should be the same indifference among you as in the ignorant ungodly world. I hope and trust there is among you:

Some desire after God.

Some hope in the savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And some endeavor to flee from the wrath to come.

And, if you are seeking him aright, God promises that "your heart shall live".

Doubtless it is necessary that you seek after God in earnest; for "the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent must take it by force." You may seek to enter in, and not be able;" you must therefore not only seek, but "strive." Moreover, you must strive in God's appointed way. To win a race, you must not only run, but run lawfully;" that is, agreeably to the laws prescribed for you; and the only way by which any of you can succeed, is by renouncing all dependence on yourselves, and founding your hopes altogether on the Lord Jesus Christ, even on his meritorious death and passion, as an expiation for your sins.

Now, if you are indeed fleeing to him for refuge, you shall assuredly find mercy from the Lord, or, as my text expresses it, "your heart shall live." This expression deserves peculiar notice. The heart of an unregenerate man is as dead and senseless as the nether millstone!

The gospel, with all its alluring promises, may be proclaimed to him—but the unregenerate man does not receive it. The gospel has no allurements for him. Nor do the denunciations of judgment and Hell excite any alarm in him.

But when God gives him a new heart, and puts a new spirit within him, and takes away his heart of stone—then all of his views, desires, and pursuits, become changed! Being alive to God, he will be alive to all holy exercises, and find his happiness in the enjoyment of his God!

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and cause you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws! [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27)."

Nor let anyone be discouraged on account of his poverty.

The poor of this world are not less regarded by Jehovah than the rich. And those who are spiritually poor, are objects of his peculiar care. Not one such person will he ever overlook. Though surrounded by myriads of holy angels, he will not allow them to attract his attention in comparison with a poor and contrite soul. No, "this is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word! [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2)." There is not a sigh which such a one utters, but it is heard by him, and is as music in God's ears; and every tear he sheds is treasured up by God in his vial. But, not to rest on mere assertions, let us look at an example.

In the prophet Jeremiah, we find a poor mourning penitent, just such a one as we are speaking of; and there we may see in what light he is viewed by God,

"I have surely heard ephraim's moaning: 'you disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'

Is not ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the Lord, [Jeremiah 31:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18-20)." This shows what favor the poor shall find in his sight; and gives the full explanation of those words, "the Lord hears the poor."

Even though a person should feel himself like a prisoner under actual sentence of death, let him not despond.

It is only in Hell that men are prisoners of despair; but while they are in this world, the worst among them is only a "prisoner of hope; and to such there is a special promise from God himself, "turn to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope; even today do I declare that I will render double unto you, [Zechariah 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.12)." Whatever your deserts of judgment have been, God will award to you a "double" measure in a way of mercy. God even condescends to assume this as his own character, whereby he may be known, even as clearly as by his works of creation, or the dispensations of his providence. "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the maker of Heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the Lord, who remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous! [Psalm 146:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.5-8)."

To them in a special manner he had respect in the gift of his son; as our Lord himself has said, "the spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. [Luke 4:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18-19)."

Only conceive of a poor wretch that has wasted all his substance, and sold himself for a slave, returning in an instant, at the sound of the trumpet, to the enjoyment of liberty, and of all his possessions; and then you have a just view of God's dealings with the most abject prisoners of hope, the very instant that they call upon him. Let every one, then, take courage, however desperate his state may appear; for this is the true character of Jehovah; and such he will approve himself to be to all who come to him in his son's name.

And now let me entreat you all to seek the savior without delay.

"Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation!" O beloved, "seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon! [Isaiah 55:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.6-7)."

#614

THE CHRISTIAN'S FRAME OF MIND

**[Psalm 70:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 70.4-5)**

"But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "let God be exalted!" Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay."

This Psalm is entitled "a Psalm to bring to remembrance." What were the things to which David more especially referred, we do not certainly know. The whole Psalm, with only a few alterations, is taken from the 40th Psalm, of which it forms a part; and it seems to have been separated for the purpose of being used by David on some particular occasion, to which the former part of that Psalm was not applicable.

It served to bring to his remembrance some special deliverances; and for a similar end it may well be used by us. We have many who would exult in our destruction, even as he had; and we may well desire that all their efforts may be frustrated, and their expectations disappointed.

On the other hand, we should desire the prosperity and happiness of the Lord's people; and be earnest with God in prayer, that we ourselves may "participate in the felicity of his chosen, and give thanks with his inheritance." Our past trials and deliverances should all be brought to remembrance for this end; and be made subservient to our own advancement in the divine life, and to the glory of our God.

From the words before us, I shall,

I. Point out to your notice that frame of mind which the Lord's people are privileged to enjoy.

Short is the description given of the Lord's people; but it is amply sufficient to distinguish them from all other people upon earth. "They seek after God, and love his salvation." The great mass of mankind live without God in the world. And of those who seek him, there are few who "love the salvation" set before us in the gospel. As for those who seek him in ways of their own devising, they have no claim to the character of God's people. Those alone are truly his, who come to him through Christ, and embrace the salvation offered them in the gospel, and love that savior who has bought them with his sin-atoning blood. To them "Christ is precious!"

1. Their privilege is to live in the daily experience of

**Sacred joy**.

Truly they have cause to rejoice. If it were only that they hear of a savior, that would be ground enough for joy; but to have a view of him in his mediatorial office, and to hope that they have obtained a saving interest in him, is a reason for "rejoicing in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory!" hence the apostle enjoins it upon us as a duty, "rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice!" "Rejoice evermore!" it surely does not befit a redeemed soul to be cast down with despondency; and still less to be in a state of stupid insensibility. He should be sensible of the mercies given unto him, and should "serve his God with gladness and joyfulness of heart."

2. Their privilege is to live in the daily experience of

**Grateful adoration**.

The Christian's joy should not terminate on the benefits he has received, or on his own personal interest in them—so much as on his God and savior, from whom he has received them. This distinction I conceive to be of considerable importance; for joy may be excited by novelty, and may be little more than an ebullition of the physical spirits arising from a new hope kindled in the soul. Whereas, when it arises rather from a contemplation of the savior's love, it is of a more refined quality, more humble, more tender, more modest, more reserved. "The children of Zion should be joyful in their king;" and, instead of arrogating anything to themselves, should say continually, "let God be magnified!"

Such was Mary's joy, when she was honored to be the means of bringing forth the savior, "my soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior."

The two kinds of joy, as considered apart, may be compared with fruit in its earlier or its more matured state. The unripe peach, for instance, is brilliant in its hues; but, while it is beauteous to the eye, it is sour to the taste; whereas that which is of a more mellowed tint, obscured perhaps by the foliage under which it hangs, will approve itself by its susceptibility of impression from the slightest touch, and the richness of its flavor when submitted to the taste. Such as this latter peach will be likened to the joys of Heaven.

The glorified saints, yes, and the angels too, all fall upon their faces before the throne of God, while yet with all their powers they sing forth the praises "of God and of the lamb." They are filled, indeed, with a sense of the benefits which they enjoy; but they are lost in wonder while beholding with unveiled face the glories of their God.

Such is the frame which the saints are privileged to enjoy on earth; they should "rejoice and be glad in the Lord;" but at the same time they should be saying continually, "let God be magnified!"

But, as all do not live in the enjoyment of this frame, I will,

II. Give some directions to those who have not yet been able to attain this frame of mind.

We see, from David's own experience, that this joy is not universal among the saints of God. There are times and seasons when, from a variety of causes, the mind of a pious person may be depressed; and when this occurs, I would say to the drooping soul: follow the example of David in our text.

1. Lie low before God in the deepest humiliation.

"I am poor and needy," was the confession of that holy man, the man after God's own heart. And well does the same language befit us all. Those who know most of themselves, will be the most ready to acknowledge that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And never are we in a frame more pleasing and acceptable to God, than when we abase ourselves before him in dust and ashes. We are told, that "God will not despise the broken and contrite heart;" nay more, that he will select, for his more immediate and delightful habitation, the humble and contrite soul! [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15). Then shall we be prepared to exalt our God, when we feel disposed to humble and abase ourselves.

2. Importune God, with all earnestness, to grant you this holy frame of mind.

There is a holy impatience, which God approves; not indeed an impatience connected with murmuring, but that which arises from intensity of desire. This feeling you may carry to its utmost possible extent, "panting after God, even as the deer after the water-brooks." And under this feeling, you may cry with a boldness almost bordering on presumption, "return to me, O Lord; make haste unto me; O Lord, make no tarrying." We may go farther still; and say, with David, "awake! Why do you sleep? Pluck your hand out of your bosom. Arise, and plead your own cause, [Psalm 44:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 44.23); [Psalm 74:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 74.11); [Psalm 74:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 74.22)."

Such is the importunity recommended to us in the parable of the unjust judge. The widow, purely by the urgency of her petitions, prevailed over one who cared not either for God or man. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bears long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily." All who wrestle like Jacob, in supplication with god—shall assuredly be partakers of his success.

3. Plead your entire dependence on God's power and grace with him.

"Make haste unto me, O God; you are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying." This is a plea which God, if I may so express myself, cannot withstand. If he withholds the light of his countenance from us—it is in order to make us more simple in our dependence on him; and when we renounce every other help or hope, and trust in him with our whole hearts, then are we as sure of support as if it had already arrived, "for his goings forth are prepared as the morning; and he shall come to us as the rain, as the latter and the former rain upon the earth, [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.3)," "those who trust in the Lord are even as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever! [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1)."

Application.

1. See that the Christian's character is your character.

Here is an easy test whereby to try yourselves: are you indeed seeking after God? Are you truly lovers of his salvation? Nothing is easier to ascertain than this. The lovers of pleasure, of riches, and of honor—plainly manifest their character; you may see it in the disposition of their minds, and in the daily habit of their lives. They use the means which are suited to their respective ends. I do not blame them for this; for it is not the pursuit of earthly things, but the inordinate pursuit of them, that is displeasing to God. But where the world is sought only in a legitimate way, the means are used in order to the end; no man expects to reap where he has not sowed. Are you then using the means of salvation, in daily prayer to God, in submission to the savior, and in a diligent performance of every known duty? You may easily ascertain your true character, if you will try yourselves by this test; and therefore to every one of you I say, "examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; test your own selves!"

2. See that you walk worthy of that character.

Do not be content to live without a real enjoyment of the divine presence. The lukewarm are in some respects more odious to God than those who are altogether destitute of any religion; because, in professing themselves to be the Lord's people, they bring nothing but disgrace upon him by their lack of zeal and love.

I say to you, brethren, and I say it from God himself, "be either cold or hot." If God is not worthy to be loved and served—then cast off his service altogether; but if he is worthy—then love and serve him with your whole hearts! It is in this way alone that you can attain any joy in the Lord. It is in this way only that you can gain such discoveries of his love, as shall constrain you to abound in grateful adoration and thanksgiving.

In the lack of joy, you may indeed be thankful, if you can mourn and weep; but God forbid that you should be satisfied with such low attainments as will leave you destitute of all comfort in religion. You are here on earth to prepare for glory; you are here to anticipate the glory that awaits you; you are here, both in word and deed, to be magnifying the Lord, in some measure as he is magnified in Heaven.

Aspire, then, to this state, which is recommended in my text, "but may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say: let God be exalted!"

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GOD A HABITATION FOR HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 71:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 71.1-3)**

"In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. Be my strong habitation, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress."

No one can enter into the spirit of David's Psalms, unless he himself has been sorely persecuted and severely tried. A very great number of the Psalms were written under circumstances of deep affliction; and record either the prayers of David for protection from his enemies, or his thanksgivings for deliverance from them.

This Psalm was written when David, far advanced in life, was driven from his throne by his son Absalom, and was in the most imminent danger of falling by the hands of his blood-thirsty pursuers. But as in early life, when threatened by Saul, he had besought the Lord, saying, "bow down your ear to me; deliver me speedily; be my strong rock, for a house of defense to save me! [Psalm 31:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.1-2);" so now, in nearly the same terms, he repeats the cry, "in you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. Be my strong habitation, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress."

Now though, through the goodness of God, we are not brought into such imminent perils as David—yet have we occasion to adopt his language, and to seek in God that protection which no created power can afford.

Let us, in discoursing on his words, consider,

I. The Sentiment Propounded.

Accustomed as we are to hear the language of the Psalms, we pass by, without any particular notice, expressions which, if duly considered, will appear truly astonishing. How extraordinary is the idea, for instance, of making Jehovah, the creator of Heaven and earth, "our habitation!" contemplate, I beg you,

1. The condescension of God in allowing himself to be so addressed.

Consider, for a moment, what a habitation is. Whether it is greater or less in point of magnificence or strength, if it is ours—then:

We have access to it as our own.

We gain a ready admission to it at all seasons.

We expect to find in it all the accommodations which our necessities require.

We regard every chamber of it as destined for our use.

We shut the door against every unwelcome intruder.

And whatever storms may rage outside, we lie down to rest in it, in perfect peace and safety.

If we superadd the idea of a fortress—then we deride the vain attempts of our enemies, and defy all the power that can be brought against us.

Now, think of God as revealing himself to us under such an image; and permitting every sinner in the universe, who will but enter in by Christ as the door, to take to himself this mansion as his own. Truly, if God himself had not authorised such a representation of his character, we should have been ready to denounce it as blasphemy. That the most high God should give even to the vilest of the human race such intimate access unto himself, seems to be perfectly incredible! Even an earthly monarch could not endure such humiliation as this; and yet the God of Heaven and earth feels it to be not unworthy of him. Truly, I say again, this condescension far exceeds all that could ever have entered into the mind of man to conceive, if the voice of inspiration itself had not announced it to us! This is the very view in which David himself speaks of it in another Psalm, "praise be to the Lord my rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me. O Lord, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? [Psalm 144:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 144.1-3)."

2. The comfort which man derives from this view of God.

Everyone, the lowest as well as the greatest of men, knows what is comprehended in the idea of a "habitation." It requires no stretch of thought to grasp it; the image is familiar to every mind; and presents itself in all its bearings to everyone that has felt the blessings of civilized society. But if we suppose a person to be under the pressure of heavy affliction, whether from the persecutions of men or the assaults of devils, what a comfort must it be to him to contemplate the wisdom, the power, the goodness, the mercy, the love, the faithfulness of almighty God; and to hear him saying, "come, enter you into your chambers, and shut the doors about you, and hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast, [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20)." How joyfully will he "hide himself in the secret of this tabernacle;" and, like the manslayer that has got within the city of his refuge, lift up his soul in adoring gratitude to God, and look with exultation on his disappointed foe!

The more we contemplate the sentiment that is here propounded, the more we shall see occasion to admire the condescension of our God, and to encourage believers upon the high privilege which is thus accorded to him.

But it is not as an abstract sentiment that this truth is declared; it is embodied in a petition that is presented to God himself; and therefore, to view it aright, we must contemplate,

II. The Petition Urged.

That it is such a petition as every one will do well to offer, will appear, if we mark,

1. The **wisdom** of it.

Every man has enemies to encounter; nor can anyone encounter them in his own strength. But we have a vantage ground to which we may flee, a fortress that is absolutely impregnable. In our God we have not only a wall, but "a wall of fire;" which, while it protects his people, will devour their assailants. With such a habitation open to us, would it not be madness to neglect it? Should we not rather "resort to it continually," yes, and abide in it, that we may enjoy the safety which is thus provided for us? If, indeed, there were any other means of safety, an option would be left us; but not all the powers of Heaven and earth can save us, if we turn our back on God, to rely upon an arm of flesh. God has said, "cursed be the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm; but blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord, [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-8)." To every one, therefore, I would say, flee to your mountain, that the flames overtake you not; and "look not back in all the plain, lest you be consumed, [Genesis 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.17)."

2. The **piety** of it.

David renounced every other hope but that which he had in God. Nor, indeed, did he wish for any other; because he saw that God was all-sufficient for him. He saw in God a sufficiency of grace to receive him, of power to protect him, of love to supply his every need; and hence it was that he was emboldened to offer the petition which we are now contemplating. In truth, without such news of God, no one would ever think of addressing him in such terms as these. There must be a just knowledge of God's character, with suitable affections towards him, or else we could never entertain such a desire as is here expressed; it is this apprehension of his excellency that could alone inspire a wish to make him, even his very bosom, our continual resort. But all who have those views of him will unite in that grateful acknowledgment, "Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations, [Psalm 90:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.1)."

Address.

1. Those who have never yet had these views of God.

Truly, you are greatly to be pitied! For who among you can hope to escape all trouble, when it is said that "we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward!" Where will you go, when enemies assail you? Where will you flee for refuge? In whom will you find the aid which you will stand in need of? Alas! your state, whatever it may now be, will be terrible beyond expression. You will resemble the host of pharaoh, who found at last that the God with whom they had presumed to contend was mightier than they. On the other hand, "acquaint yourselves with God, and you shall be at peace," both now and in the eternal world!

2. Those who have resorted to him under this character.

Hear what the Psalmist says concerning you, "because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the most high, your habitation, there shall no evil befall you! [Psalm 91:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-10)." Truly, "his name is a strong tower, to which you may run at all times, and be safe! [Proverbs 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.10);" and whatever your circumstances may be, "he will be to you as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land! [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2)." Enjoy, then, the exalted privilege which is here given unto you. And let there not be a day, or an hour, wherein you do not resort to God under this endearing character, dwelling in him, abiding in him, and finding in him all that your necessities can require.

#616

THE KING'S ACCESSION

**[Psalm 71:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 71.7-9)**

"I have become as a wonder to many, but you are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with your praise and with your glory all the day. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails!"

This day being called the Jubilee (October 25, 1809,) it will be proper to inform you why that name is given to it. By the Mosaic law, every seventh year was a sabbatical year, or year of rest. At the end of the seventh sabbatical year, that is the 49th year, there was a year of universal rest, not to the land only, but to people of every description; debtors were released, captives liberated, and inheritances restored! This was, as might be expected, a season of peculiar joy.

The connection between that day, and this which we now celebrate, is only in the time, the grounds of joy being altogether different. We are called to celebrate the fiftieth year of our monarch's reign. On this account, I have chosen a subject which I consider as appropriate to the occasion. The Psalm before us was written (we apprehend) after Absalom's rebellion. In discoursing on that portion of it which we have read to you, it will be proper:

I. To Consider it in Reference to David.

Absalom being dead, and the rebellion suppressed, David finds himself firmly seated on his throne; on which occasion,

1. David acknowledges the mercies he had received.

He felt himself most peculiarly circumstanced; his trials had been great, and his deliverances most extraordinary. His hair-breadth escapes from Saul, and afterwards from foreign and domestic enemies, were very numerous; he had recently been even driven from his throne by his son Absalom, the partisans of whom were ordered to direct their efforts exclusively against him; yet from this danger also had he been delivered; so that he seemed to all to be under the peculiar protection of God. His mind too had in all these trials been wonderfully preserved from anything vindictive, or unworthy of his high character. On all these accounts, he was "a wonder unto many."

There was indeed a reason for these mercies, which his enemies had no idea of, "he had made God his refuge." When persecuted by men, he betook himself to prayer, and "encouraged himself in God." Thus, under all circumstances, he had "God for his glory and defense."

2. David makes a suitable improvement of them.

He renders thanks to God for his past favors. In this the Psalmist was so exemplary, that he seems frequently to breathe almost the very language of Heaven itself; in this too he is distinguished from almost all other saints; others abound in prayer, but he in praise.

He next prays for a continuance of these favors. He well knew that he could no longer be safe than while he was under the care of the almighty; and that now in his advanced age he needed, if possible, more than ever the guidance and protection of Heaven; hence he prayed that God would "not cast him off in his old age, nor forsake him when his strength failed him."

Such is the import of the passage. Let us now,

II. Accommodate this passage to the Circumstances of this Day.

Well may we at this time acknowledge the mercies of God to us.

Our king may truly be said to be "a wonder unto many," whether we consider the length, or the prosperity, of his reign. Twice only, within the space of a thousand years, has any monarch of ours reigned so long as to see a jubilee kept on his account. And if we consider the state of the world, it is truly wonderful, that, after so many difficulties as we have encountered, we should stand so eminent among the nations.

Some indeed are fond of representing us as in a distressed and fallen state. But let such people compare us with all the other nations of Europe, and they will see that, while all of them have fallen a sacrifice to the politics or arms of France, we are as rich and potent as at any period of our history. That we have burdens to bear, is certain; but it is very unfair to ascribe them to our governors. These burdens have arisen out of the circumstances of the world around us; in which we were of necessity involved; and from which we could no more disengage ourselves, than we could exempt our nation from the physical motion of the globe.

We should also make a similar improvement of God's mercies.

Many are the grounds which we have for praise and thanksgiving; and our mouths may well "be filled with God's praise all the day." On this day especially we are called to manifest our gratitude both in a way of spiritual, and, if I may so speak, of carnal joy. Some, in their zeal for spiritual joy, forget that we consist of body as well as of a spiritual part; and that in the scriptures we have numerous instances of national gratitude expressed by the combined exercise of spiritual and carnal joy. Such was that holy feast which David himself, together with his people, kept, not long after he had written this Psalm, [1 Chronicles 29:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.20-22). And it is truly gratifying to think that, through the benevolence of the rich, all the poorer classes of society are enabled to participate, in a more than ordinary measure, in the bounties of providence, and to share in the general joy.

Yet have we also peculiar need of prayer. At this moment our enemy is disengaged from other contests, and enabled to direct all his force against us. Our own government also is unhappily disunited, and our aged king begins to find "his strength fail him." What, in such a state, shall we do, if God forsakes us? We have need to pray unto him "not to cast us off." Our prosperity hitherto has surely been in a great measure owing to this, that we "have made God our refuge." Both king and people, when compared with other nations, have been exemplary in this. Let us continue to seek him more and more; and then, whatever be our state on earth, we shall keep an eternal jubilee in Heaven.

#617

SALVATION A GROUND OF JOY

**[Psalm 71:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 71.15)**

"My mouth shall tell of your righteousness and your salvation all the day, though their number is past my knowledge!"

Perhaps, of all mankind, no one person ever experienced more signal deliverances than David. In his early life he was exposed to the most imminent dangers from Saul. During his whole reign he was engaged in almost one continual scene of warfare; and in his old age, his own son Absalom conspired against him, and sought his life. It was on this last occasion that he penned this Psalm; and gave it to the church, as a memorial of God's unbounded mercy and faithfulness towards him.

The spirit which he breathes in the words before us shows,

I. What the subjects of our daily contemplation should be.

We, like David, have numberless mercies to acknowledge at God's hands. Could we but see one half of the deliverances we have received, we would be perfectly overwhelmed with wonder and astonishment. From our youth up, even to the present moment, his care of us has been unintermitted, and his interpositions truly wonderful. But still greater has been His care for our souls. Behold the blessings of "salvation" which He has revealed to us; truly their number surpasses knowledge! Behold, I say, Behold, I say,

1. How inestimable are our numberless mercies!

Who can ever declare the value of pardon or peace, or holiness or eternal glory? Go down to the dread abodes of Hell—and see the misery of unpardoned sin! Or go up to the regions of bliss in Heaven—and see the joys that are at God's right hand for evermore! Or ponder the state of God's redeemed people here on earth—and contrast the liberty enjoyed by His children, with the bondage endured by the slaves of Satan! Then you will see what unspeakable obligations we owe to God for his electing, redeeming and regenerating grace!

2. How incalculable is the price paid for our numberless mercies!

"You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God! [1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19)." In comparison with this, ten thousand worlds would have been a worthless sacrifice. How inconceivable the cost! Truly, "their number is past our knowledge!" Nor could all the angels in Heaven count the mighty sum!

3. How unsearchable is the grace displayed in our numberless mercies!

All of our numberless mercies are the fruits of God's Sovereign Grace! And all are bestowed on the very chief of sinners. Yes, all of them are not only unmerited by us, but unsought and unsolicited!

In the first instance, they were given to man when he was risen up in rebellion against his maker; and even still they are conferred on men, "not according to their works, but according to God's purpose and grace, which he purposed from all eternity in Christ Jesus" our Lord! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9).

Let us, then, consider,

II. What the frame of our minds in relation to our numberless mercies should be?

Our determination should resemble that of David "our mouth should tell of your righteousness and your salvation all the day".

1. In grateful acknowledgments to God.

It seems really astonishing, that men so indebted to their God should be able to find time for everything, but praise. David in his Psalms, sets us a good example, "I will extol you, my God, O king; and I will bless your name forever and ever! verse 8 with [Psalm 145:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-2)." Let us only learn to appreciate the mercies we have received aright, and there will be no bounds to our gratitude, no end to our praise!

2. In affectionate commendations to men.

David desired to make known to others the goodness of his God. In the Psalm just cited, hear how he dilates upon this subject, "I will speak of the glorious honor of your majesty, and of your wondrous works; and men shall speak of the might of your awesome acts; and I will declare your greatness; they shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and talk of your power; to make known to men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of your kingdom, verse 24 with [Psalm 145:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.5-6); [Psalm 145:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.11-12). See also [Psalm 40:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.9-10)." What other subject of conversation can we ever find so interesting, so useful, so worthy of a rational being, and, above all, so suitable to a redeemed soul?

Behold, then,

1. What glorious subjects have ministers to proclaim!

The apostles "preached to men the unsearchable riches of Christ! [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8)." So filled with this subject was the apostle Paul, that "he determined to know nothing among his people but Jesus Christ, and him crucified! [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2)." This is an utterly inexhaustible subject; in it "are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3)." O, that every minister would bring it forth to his people! Surely his hearers should soon be enriched; for it cannot be that the Savior should ever be exhibited in vain, and his salvation be offered unto men in vain. But,

2. How unlike David are the generality of professors!

David would think and speak of nothing else but God's righteousness and salvation; but the generality of men scarcely ever speak or think of it at all. Indeed, this is the one subject which, beyond all others, is, as it were, by universal consent, proscribed; so that we may mix in company for years and scores of years, and never once hear it brought forward in the way that David and the apostles spoke of it. And even Christian men are too little impressed with it, either in their conversations with men, or in their secret addresses at the throne of grace.

Mark the frame of your minds, brethren, from day to day, and see whether you have not reason to blush and be ashamed for the little impression which this subject makes upon your minds. But as for the world at large, if anything under Heaven can show them how far they are from God, methinks they must see it by comparing their experience with that of David in our text.

3. What a resemblance to Heaven is the saint's life on earth!

Let us suppose a saint resembling David, and uttering from his inmost soul the expressions in my text; and you will immediately be reminded of the heavenly host, who "rest not day and night," ascribing, without a moment's intermission, and with all the powers they possess, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb!" take this view, then, of real piety, and seek, my brethren, to begin your Heaven upon earth.

'Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare!" [Psalm 40:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.5)

#618

EXCELLENCE OF CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT

**[Psalm 72:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.6-11)**

"May the king's rule be refreshing like spring rain on freshly cut grass, like the showers that water the earth. May all the godly flourish during his reign. May there be abundant prosperity until the moon is no more. May he reign from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. Desert nomads will bow before him; his enemies will fall before him in the dust. The western kings of Tarshish and other distant lands will bring him tribute. The eastern kings of Sheba and Seba will bring him gifts. All kings will bow before him, and all nations will serve him!"

The priesthood of Christ is that to which our attention is principally called in the New Testament; the epistle to the Hebrews being almost exclusively written upon that subject.

But in the Old Testament there seems to be a far more studied exhibition of his kingly office. The whole levitical law indeed typically displayed his priestly character; but the prophets continually, in the most express terms, declared, that the person, who was to be "a child born and a son given," would have "the government upon his shoulder, [Isaiah 9:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6-7)," and that a universal and everlasting dominion should be committed to him, [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14).

The Psalm before us is altogether occupied in describing the nature of his government, and the blessings which should result from it. There was surely some reference to Solomon, who was the first of the Israelites that was both "a king, and a king's son, verse 1;" but the language in many parts cannot with any truth or propriety be applied to him; it can relate to none but him who was greater than Solomon, even to the Messiah, whose glory no words can adequately describe.

The sublime passage which we have selected for our meditation at this time, will lead us to show,

I. The **nature** of Christ's government.

It has generally happened, that those whose power has been most absolute have been most tyrannical in their use of it; and that they have sought rather the aggrandizement of themselves, than the good of their subjects. But the administration of Christ is like the influence of the heavens:

1. The government of Christ is **gently operative**.

"The showers gently descending on the parched ground, or the new-mown grass," insinuate themselves in a silent and imperceptible manner to the roots, and cause the suspended powers of vegetation to exert themselves with renewed vigor. It is thus that Christ, by his word and spirit, renovates the soul. He comes not with the sanctions of the law, which, like an impetuous torrent or a desolating tempest, spread terror and dismay; he descends to us rather in mild invitations and gracious promises, which, through the effectual influences of his Spirit, penetrate the recesses of the heart, and give life and vigor to the whole man. When once we are cut down, as it were, and made to feel our need of him—then he pours upon us the riches of his grace, to soften the hardness of our hearts, and to invigorate the withered faculties of our souls. As it was not by "the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, that God wrought upon Elijah, but by the still small voice," at the sound of which the prophet "wrapped his face in his mantle, [1 Kings 19:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.11-13);" so it is with respect to the secret visits of our Lord. When he is pleased to speak to us in the mild accents of his love, then the heart is dissolved in tenderness and contrition, or sweetly elevated in devout and grateful adorations.

2. The government of Christ is **richly productive**.

The sickly plants, when watered, raise up their drooping heads, and bring forth, each according to its nature—their proper fruits. Thus, in the day of Christ's descent upon the souls of the "righteous, they flourish;" and "peace," the first-fruit of the Spirit, "abounds within them." The image in the text beautifully represents the change which is produced, when "a season of refreshing comes from the presence of the Lord." The person thus highly favored "flourishes" like the palm-tree; he becomes as "a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth fruit in his season; his leaf does not wither; and whatever he does, it prospers! [Psalm 92:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 92.12-13); [Psalm 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.3)." If the sun of persecution arises upon him, it does not now scorch him and destroy his root, [Matthew 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.6); [Matthew 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.21) with [Jeremiah 17:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.8) and [Hosea 14:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.5-7), but rather calls into activity his vital energies; and serves only to display with fuller evidence the communications he has received from God. Nothing now robs him of his peace. As much as the Christian laments his former iniquities, they no longer disturb his peace, because the guilt of them is washed away in "the fountain opened to cleanse them from sin and impurity!"

Nor does the prospect of death and judgment appal him, because "he knows in whom he has believed," and that "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." His rapturous joys may intermit and subside, but his peace shall continue "as long as the moon endures."

A due consideration of these things will lead us to rejoice in,

II. The **extent** of Christ's dominion.

Earthly monarchs have vainly imagined themselves possessed of universal empire; but it is to Christ alone that this truly and properly belongs. Christ's dominion extends itself over t

1. Christ's dominion extends itself over the most distant **places**.

Solomon's empire was the most extensive of any that was governed by Jewish kings. It reached from the river Euphrates to the Red Sea; and comprehended all the countries between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean, "it was from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

But Christ has literally "the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." His kingdom was speedily erected in every part of the known world; and at this moment there are multitudes in every civilized nation under Heaven, yes, also among barbarians and savages, who acknowledge him as their supreme Governor, and render the most cheerful obedience to his commands. Already is that prophecy fulfilled, "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering, [Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.11)." In this therefore we have a pledge that the knowledge of him "shall yet more extensively prevail, and shall one day cover the earth as the waters cover the sea! [Isaiah 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.9) and [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.9)."

2. Christ's dominion extends itself over the most exalted **personages**.

It was said of Solomon, in reference to the fore-mentioned countries, that "all the kings of the earth sought his presence, and brought presents to him; and that he reigned over them, [2 Chronicles 9:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 9.23-24); 2 Chronicles 9:26."

Nominally too, a great multitude of kings are subject unto Christ; but, alas! his real subjects have hitherto been few among them. What Paul complained of in his time has been verified in all succeeding ages to the present day, "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called! [1 Corinthians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26)." But the time is coming when the most potent monarchs upon earth shall become his willing subjects, and "bow down themselves, and lick the dust before him," in a humble acknowledgment of their entire dependence on him, and of their unreserved devotion to his will. This seems to be the true meaning of "licking the dust." Compare [Isaiah 49:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.23). "He is Lord of lords, and King of kings;" and if any will not bend to the scepter of his grace, they shall be broken in pieces with a rod of iron! [Psalm 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9).

INFERENCES.

1. The folly of refusing submission to Christ.

The Word of Jehovah is pledged, that "the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, [Revelation 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 11.15)." Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ himself has "sworn, that unto him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear [Isaiah 45:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23)." To what purpose then shall we hold out against him, when we know what must infallibly be the outcome of the contest? He has told us what he will say to his attendants in the last day, "Bring here my enemies, which would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me! [Luke 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.27)." Let us then "be wise" in time; let us "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish! [Psalm 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.10-12)."

2. The blessedness of being Christ's faithful subjects.

It is a rich blessing to live under a mild and just government. But no earthly monarch, however well disposed, can render his subjects happy, like the adorable Jesus. He gives us access to him all times, and sheds forth upon us his gracious influences, whereby our spirits are revived, and our souls strengthened. What Solomon speaks figuratively in reference to earthly kings, is literally true with respect to him, "When the king smiles, there is life; his favor refreshes like a spring rain! [Proverbs 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.15)." "Happy then are you, O Israel! Who is like unto you! [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)." "Let Israel rejoice in Him who made him, and redeemed him; and let the children of Zion be joyful in their King! [Psalm 149:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.2)."

3. What encouragement we have to exert ourselves for the diffusion of the Gospel throughout the world!

If we look at the state of the world, or at the weakness of the instruments which we employ, we shall despair of producing any great effects. But we have nothing to fear, as God has spoken; and he will do it. Who that sees the effect of the sun and showers upon the earth, and the rapid change which takes place, from the desolation of winter, to the verdure of the spring and the fruits of autumn—can doubt the power of the Redeemer's grace to convert and sanctify all the nations of the world? It shall be done; and perhaps, notwithstanding the present unfavorable appearances, the time for it is not so distant as we may imagine. What has already been effected towards it, has been wrought through the instrumentality of a few ignorant or hostile men. In the same way, in like manner, though there were none among us who were not ignorant as the Galilean fishermen, or hostile as Saul, the grace of Christ shall be sufficient, both to raise up instruments and to bless their endeavors.

I call upon all of you, then, according to your ability, to be fellow-workers with Christ in this good work—assured, that the events predicted in my text shall certainly be accomplished in God's appointed time; and that all of our labors for Christ, whether effectual or not for the end we desired, shall be accepted and recompensed by him whom we serve, and whose empire we labor to establish!

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CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT OF HIS CHURCH

**[Psalm 72:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.12-15)**

"For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long!"

The science of Government is at all times interesting to the human mind. Respecting the different forms of Government, there must of necessity be a great diversity of opinion; but respecting the ends of it there can be but one sentiment in every bosom. The one concern of those in authority should be to promote to the utmost possible extent the welfare and happiness of all who are committed to their charge; and in proportion as this object is pursued, must the existence of Government and the exercise of legitimate authority be numbered among the richest blessings bestowed upon mankind.

It was from a conviction of this truth that the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, "Happy are your men, happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you, and that hear your wisdom. Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, to set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore made He you king, to do judgment and justice, [1 Kings 10:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.8-9)."

Perhaps in no country, at any period of the world, were these ends of Government so extensively attained as in Israel, under the reign of Solomon. It is in praise of his administration that the Psalm before us was penned. Yet there are parts of the Psalm which clearly show that the inspired penman had respect to a greater King than Solomon, even to "Messiah the Prince," the "King of kings, and Lord of lords." The reference of the Psalm to Him being universally acknowledged, we will draw your attention to the two points which are unfolded in our text; namely,

I. The interest which Christ takes in his people.

The description here given of his people deserves especial notice.

In the former part of the Psalm, they are repeatedly characterized as poor and needy. "He shall judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with judgment. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor, verses 2, 4." In the text itself this description is given of them even to tautology, "He shall deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy."

We are not to understand, from hence, that he reigns over no other; though it is certain that over his people chiefly he has reigned hitherto, [1 Corinthians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26). [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5). But, as his reign is spiritual, so it is in a spiritual view that his subjects are here described; and, truly, to this description do they all answer; and it is an unspeakable comfort to them that they are so described; for, if they had been designated by any nobler title, thousands of them would, have doubted whether they might dare to number themselves among his subjects; but, under the character of the poor and needy, the very least, as well as the greatest of his subjects, can confidently assert their claim to that honor.

It is here taken for granted, too, that his people will be exposed to heavy trials from an oppressive and ungodly world. And because the violence of persecution has in great measure ceased in the present day, we are ready to imagine the disposition to oppress them has ceased. But this is by no means the case. The laws of the land protect the godly from that measure of persecution which at different times and under different pretexts has raged against them; but the contempt in which the saints are held, solely and entirely on the ground of their sanctity, clearly shows that the enmity against them has not ceased, but is only restrained by legal enactments, and a more general diffusion of civil and religious liberty. It is still as true as at any period of the world, that "if we were of the world, the world would love its own; but because we are not of the world, but Christ has chosen us out of the world, therefore the world hates us! [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)."

But Jesus will suit his ministration to their necessities.

If he allows them to be oppressed for a while, it is only that he may the more visibly and acceptably exert himself in their behalf. Let them only "cry" unto him, and he will show himself strong in their behalf, and mighty to save.

There are but two ways in which anyone can gain an unjust dominion over his people; namely, by fraudulent enticement, or by overpowering force. But, though both of these be combined for the bringing of them into bondage, he will interpose for them, and "redeem them both from deceit and violence." Or, if God should permit an oppressor so far to prevail over them as to take away their life, he will vindicate their cause, and make their enemy to feel that "precious is their blood in his sight." But over "their souls" shall none prevail.

Not even their great adversary, though as a subtle serpent he put forth all his devices to beguile them, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3), or as a roaring lion he make his utmost efforts to devour them, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8), he shall not be able; for Jesus will effectually preserve them, and not suffer so much as "one of them to be plucked out of his hand! [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28)." As it is his Father's will, so also is it Jesus' will, that not one of his little ones should perish! [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32).

As for their poverty and helplessness, this shall operate with him rather as an inducement to afford them his support, than as an obstacle to his gracious interference; indeed, the more they feel their utter dependence upon him, the more readily and effectually will he exert himself in their behalf, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

Nor shall they be insensible of his kindness towards them; for the text informs us of,

II. The interest which his people take in Christ.

In the life of such a king as Solomon, the whole nation is deeply interested. But he, however long he reign, must die at last; but the King of Zion shall live forever. "He was indeed crucified through weakness; but he lives by the power of God! [2 Corinthians 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.4);" yes, "he is alive for evermore, [Revelation 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.18)."

Now, as in earthly governments the people pay tribute to their king, and pray for the prosperity of his kingdom, and take all suitable occasions for displaying their loyalty, whether in a way of private commendation or public address; so the subjects of King Messiah approve themselves worthy of the relation in which they stand to him:

1. They pay him their tribute.

"The silver and the gold are his;" and though he is able to carry on the affairs of his government without any contribution from man—yet he is pleased to make use of human instruments, and to give his people an opportunity of manifesting their zeal in his service; hence they bring him their willing offerings. As, at his first appearance in the world, the wise men presented to him gold and incense and myrrh—so now it is the joy of all his people to contribute, according to their ability, to the enlargement and establishment of his kingdom. Gladly do they "give him of the gold of Sheba;" and account it all as of no value, except us it is employed in subservience to his will, and for the advancement of his glory. The very widow accounts it her honor and her happiness to cast her mite into his treasury; and he accepts it with the same pleasure as the richest contributions of the great and wealthy.

2. They offer their prayers in his behalf.

Personally, he needs them not. In this respect he is unlike the kings of the earth. But for the prosperity of his kingdom he enjoins us to pray. One of the first petitions which, in his short and comprehensive prayer, he has taught us to pour forth, is, "May Your kingdom come." In this sense, "prayer is made for him continually," by every subject of his kingdom. It is a grief to his people to see so great a part of the world still ignorant of him, and persisting in a rejection of his light and easy yoke; and they long to behold both Jews and Gentiles prostrate at his feet. "They rest not day or night" in calling upon God to take to him his great power and reign among them; yes, they give him no rest, until he shall arise and "subdue all nations to the obedience of faith, [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7)."

3. They render unto him their most devout acknowledgments.

A grateful people cannot but acknowledge with gratitude the blessings which they enjoy under the paternal government of a wise and pious king. But, as great as earthly benefits are, they are not to be compared with those which we receive under the government of the Lord Jesus. What protection from enemies, what peaceful quiet, what abundance of all spiritual blessings does the very least and lowest of his subjects enjoy! Enjoy, too, as the very result of his care over them, and of his bounty towards them.

An earthly prince, however ardent his desires or laborious his efforts, could not drive away distress from his dominions; nor, if it were possible for his subjects, all of them without exception, to have access to him, could he administer to them the relief which they solicited.

But Jesus is accessible at all times to every believer in his vast empire; and can both listen to their requests without weariness, and fulfill them without delay. This, too, is a truth, of which every individual among them is sensible; all of them having been deeply oppressed with need, and having carried to him their respective trials, and having received relief at his hands.

Every one of them, therefore, "praises him daily," as the one author of all his blessings, and the one ground of all his hopes. See this done first in general terms, [Psalm 145:1-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-13); and then, for his more particular acts of grace, [Psalm 145:14-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.14-21) and [Psalm 146:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.1-2); [Psalm 146:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.7-10).

Such, then, being the mutual regard existing between the Lord Jesus Christ and his people, let me, in conclusion, call you to contemplate:

1. The folly of casting off Christ's yoke.

He has ascended up on high, and has set down on the right hand of God, until all his enemies shall become his footstool, [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1). And do you suppose that any will be able successfully to hold out against him? No, his arrows shall be very sharp in the hearts of all his enemies; and the stoutest of them all shall lick the dust; yes, "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him! verse 11." Let none of you, then, continue in your stoutness of heart; but cast down the weapons of your rebellion, and implore mercy at his hands. Then shall you find, that in the mercy which he exercises, no less than in the justice he administers, "your blood shall be precious in his sight."

2. The happiness of his faithful subjects.

This is great, if we considered only what is spoken respecting them in the text. But their happiness infinitely transcends any thing that earthly monarchs are able to bestow. They are themselves, all of them without exception, made kings, and have a kingdom given unto them by their Lord, similar to that which has been conferred on the Messiah himself by his heavenly Father, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

Hear this, you poor and needy souls! Are you not amazed, that you should be "taken, as it were, from a dunghill, and set among princes, and made to inherit a throne of glory! [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8)." Yet be assured that this is your portion, if only you approve yourselves faithful to your Lord and King. Yes, "be faithful unto death, and you shall, every one of you, inherit a crown of life!"

#620

THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL

**[Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.16)**

"There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, On the top of the mountains; Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; And those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth!"

In many parts of Scripture the typical sense is more manifest than the literal sense. It is so in the Psalm before us.

This Psalm is a description of the reign of Solomon, who was the first of the "kings" that was also a "king's son." The extent, duration, and happiness of his government are predicted by David his father.

But a greater than Solomon is here. There can be no doubt but that the glory of the Messiah's kingdom is here described. The extent of that is unbounded, and the blessedness of it is eternal. The words of the text, according to their literal meaning, declare the fruitfulness of the land, and the increase of population in the days of Solomon; but they typically represent the spread of the Gospel under the Christian dispensation, and the multitudes of converts that shall become the subjects of Messiah's kingdom. They naturally lead us to consider,

I. The representation here given of the preached Gospel.

The Gospel is compared to seed cast upon the earth.

This is a frequent comparison in the Scriptures; nor can any other be more just. The seed is that from which the whole harvest springs. Weeds will grow by themselves, but grain requires culture; nor can any harvest be expected but in consequence of a patient and laborious attention to the duties of husbandry.

Thus it is also with the Gospel. That is the seed from which alone any fruit will arise to God. Men will bring forth all manner of evil fruits without any instruction or advice. But never will they abound in fruits of righteousness unless the seed of divine truth is first sown in their hearts.

The place whereon this seed is cast is like "the tops of mountains".

Valleys are fruitful; but mountains, and especially the mountain-tops, are barren. They rarely have any soil; nor, if they had, would they be proper situations for the sowing of grain. Were any grain to spring up upon them, the storms and tempests would destroy it long before it could arrive at maturity.

Such is the world at large, and the heart of every individual in it—barren in itself, and exposed to storms of passion and floods of temptation. And most discouraging is the prospect of that laborer who goes forth to sow his grain in such a soil.

Moreover the mountain-tops were the places where the idols of the heathen deities were worshiped. In reference to this custom, the prophet Isaiah, foretelling the triumph of the Gospel over all false religions, says, "The mountain of the Lord's House shall be established on the top of the mountains."

Thus were the mountain-tops the seat of all superstition and idolatry. What a view does this give us of the place whore the Gospel seed is sown! Yet, alas! it is but too just a representation both of the world, and of the heart of man. Superstition and idolatry abound in every place and every heart. What seed then can be expected ever to flourish in so foul a soil?

Nor is there more than a mere "handful" of grain sown there.

If the seed were multiplied in proportion to the badness of the soil, there might be some little hope for a harvest. But of what use is a mere handful of grain when cast on a surface of such vast extent? What hope could there be that the whole world should be evangelized by twelve poor fishermen?

Even at this time, how wide the field, and how few the laborers! Millions of our fellow-creatures never so much as hear the name of Christ; and of those who do, there are, alas! too many who never have the whole counsel of God declared unto them.

But notwithstanding these discouragements we shall not despair of the success of the Gospel, if we consider:

II. The blessing which God has promised to it.

The prophecy before us declares that:

1. The increase of this seed shall be **strong**.

The woods of "Lebanon" were proverbially grand. Waving their lofty heads, they seemed to defy the storms and tempests. Such was to be the fruit that would spring from the Gospel seed. As weak as grain is to withstand a storm, that which was to grow upon the mountain-tops should be firm as the deep-rooted cedars.

And has not the outcome justified the prediction? The powers of earth and Hell combined against the infant church, but were not able to crush it. Neither imprisonment nor death could intimidate the disciples of Jesus. Even the weaker gender were enabled to endure the most cruel tortures, and to glory in their tribulations for Jesus' sake.

In every successive age the same holy fortitude has characterized the followers of the Lamb. If any through the fear of man have forsaken the Church, they have only proved thereby that they never truly belonged to it, "they went out from us because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us! [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.19)." Every true believer has been faithful unto death.

2. The increase of this seed shall be **numerous**.

What is more numerous than the piles of grass? Yet such, it was foretold, should be the converts to Christianity. And how was this verified in the apostolic age! Thousands were converted by one single sermon. In a few years the followers of Christ filled, not Judea alone, but also the whole Roman empire. At the reformation too, the seed that had long lain under the earth, sprang up and yielded a glorious harvest. But the promised period is yet future, though, we hope, it is hastening on apace. In the latter day "the people of God shall be as the stars of Heaven for multitude". "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation! [Isaiah 60:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.22)." Yes, "a nation shall be born in a day!" And "All the ends of the earth shall turn unto the Lord, [Psalm 22:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.27)." There still indeed may be seasons when, as in former ages, they shall be mown down by their persecutors; but they shall spring up again like the grass; and the very blood of the martyrs shall be the seed of the church. "The knowledge of the Lord shall surely cover the earth as the waters cover the sea! [Habakkuk 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.14)."

This subject may well excite in us,

1. Thankfulness for what is **past**.

What a mercy is it, that, when only a handful of grain is sown on the earth, some grains of it should fall on this barren spot! And what a signal mercy if it has sprung up in our hearts! And have we not reason to hope that this is indeed the case? If we cannot boast of multitudes like the piles of grass, are there not sufficient to show the virtue of the Gospel-seed, and the blessing of God upon the sowing of it? Have not some attained a height and stability, and maintained their steadfastness against the united assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil?

Let us then rejoice and be thankful to God for such distinguished blessings. And let us still show ourselves to have been "planted in the house of the Lord, by flourishing in the courts of our God."

2. Hope respecting the **future**.

The promise of God is sure, and shall be fulfilled in its season. We cannot but grieve when we see the barrenness of the field, and fewness of faithful laborers. But there is nothing impossible with God. He can send forth laborers into his harvest, and give the most abundant success to the seed sown. Yes, he can overrule the most adverse circumstances for the manifestation of his own glory. Let us wait upon him then in prayer, and cry from our inmost souls, "May Your kingdom come!"

Let us beg, "That the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified" throughout the world, [2 Thessalonians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.1). And let us look forward in certain expectation, that the "grain of mustard-seed shall become a great tree [Matthew 13:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.32)," and that in due time "All shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest! [Jeremiah 31:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.34)."

#621

THE PERPETUITY AND EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

**[Psalm 72:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.17)**

"His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed!"

None of the Prophets, except Isaiah, have written so copiously and so plainly respecting Christ as David. His prophecies are very frequently referred to in the New Testament; and their accomplishment in Jesus is frequently asserted, incontestably proved, and copiously illustrated. The Psalm before us was most probably the last that David penned. It was written at the close of his life, on occasion of Solomon's coronation. The dying monarch hearing that his son Adonijah had usurped his throne, gave immediate orders that Solomon should be anointed with the holy oil, and placed upon the throne, and be proclaimed king throughout all his dominions; that by this means his oath to Bathsheba, respecting the succession of Solomon, might be fulfilled, and the nation be rescued from the calamities in which a disputed succession might involve it 1 Kings 1:33-35.

The Psalm begins with a prayer for Solomon, and proceeds to foretell the peace, glory, extent, duration, and happiness of his government. But beyond, a doubt, a greater than Solomon is here; the Messiah himself is manifestly referred to; and the words of our text must be considered as describing his kingdom!

I. The **perpetuity** of Christ's kingdom.

The names, not of the Jewish monarchs only, but also of many heroes of antiquity, have been handed down to us, and probably will be transmitted to the last generations. But there are several points of view in which the remembrance of Jesus' name differs widely from that of any other person whatever.

It is transmitted to us in a way of lineage. Other names come down to us by means of historic records; but that of our blessed Lord "is continued," or propagated (as the word means) in the same way as the name of a father is continued in his children. Children were born to him by the preaching of his Gospel; and, after him, were called Christians; from that period, others have risen up, in constant succession, to perpetuate his name; nor shall the line ever be broken, "instead of the fathers there shall be children, who shall make his name to be remembered in all generations! [Psalm 45:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.16-17); [Psalm 145:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.4-6)."

It is heard with the same regard that it ever was. There was a time when the name of Caesar or of Alexander made whole nations tremble; but who fears them now? What is their love or their hatred unto us? What is Solomon himself to us? We admire his character; but for his person we have no regard. But it is not thus with the sacred name of Jesus. We tremble at it with a holy awe; we love it, as expressing all that is amiable and endearing. We dread his displeasure above all things, and covet his favor more than life itself. And as long as the sun shall continue its course, so long shall the name of Jesus be venerated and adored.

It "endures" in spite of all the endeavors that have been made to blot out the remembrance of it from under Heaven. No sooner was the name of Jesus exalted by the preaching of the Apostles, than the rulers exerted all their power to suppress it; they beat and imprisoned the preachers, and threatened them with yet severer punishment, if they should presume to speak any more in his name, [Acts 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.17-18); [Acts 5:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.28); [Acts 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.40). Thus also, in all subsequent ages, "the potentates of the earth have taken counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying: Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us, [Psalm 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.2)."

What name, like that of Jesus, is proscribed at this day? We may descant upon the virtues of ancient sages; and the more light we can throw upon their characters, the more acceptable we shall be in every company; but let us speak of Jesus, let us set forth his transcendent excellencies, and expatiate upon all the wonders of his love, and we shall excite in our hearers nothing but disgust! But has this confederacy prevailed to banish his name? No; rather, "the more his people have been afflicted, the more they have grown and multiplied;" and however earth and Hell may combine their efforts to efface his memory, or diminish his influence, "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh at them, and have them in derision! [Psalm 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.4)."

II. The **excellency** of Christ's kingdom.

The administration of Solomon was attended with great benefit to his people; and such a king as he must be considered as a rich blessing to any nation. But there are many benefits which it is not in the power of any king to communicate. What can a creature do to mitigate our pains, or to rescue us from the dominion of unbridled lusts? It is otherwise with the Lord Jesus; he can impart to his subjects whatever blessings they need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity!

Do we desire the pardon of our sins? We may be "justified freely through his blood! [Romans 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.9)."

Do we long for peace of conscience? He has left it to his subjects as a legacy, [John 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.27), and gives them "a peace which passes all understanding! [Philippians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.7)."

Do we stand in need of strength? "Through him we shall be enabled to do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

Do we extend our desires to all the glory of Heaven? "In him we may be saved with an everlasting salvation, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

It is not sufficient to say that the subjects of Christ's kingdom may be thus blessed; for they actually are so; there is not one in all his dominions who is not thus highly favored. If we consult the prophets, they declare this uniformly; and represent them all as saying, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25)." If we consult the Apostles, they declare, that every blessing we enjoy is "in him, even in him;" yes, that "in him we are blessed with all spiritual and eternal blessings! [Ephesians 1:3-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.3-13), where it is repeated at least eight times. Strange that any should overlook this truth."

III. The **universality** of Christ's kingdom

The greatest monarchs of this world, have had a very limited sway; and many who have been called their subjects, have been so rather in name than in reality. But Christ's dominion shall be strictly and literally universal, "the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ! [Revelation 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 11.15)." Already there are some of all nations who submit to his government. We may go to the most uncultivated parts of the earth, where human nature seems but little elevated above the beasts, and there we shall find some who acknowledge him as their sovereign Lord. But his dominion is certainly at present very limited. There is a time however coming, when "all nations shall call him blessed." The rich and great shall take upon them his yoke; according as it is said, "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him! verse 10, 11." The poor and base also shall devote themselves to his service, according to that prediction, "Holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses, [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.9); [Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.20-21)." Thus shall "all know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest! [Jeremiah 31:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.34)."

As at this present time all the subjects of his kingdom are blessing and adoring him as the one author of all their happiness. Just so, at a future period, shall "every knee bow to him, and every tongue confess ,[Romans 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.11);" and "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory, verse 19." But it is not until the day of judgment that the full accomplishment of this prophecy shall be seen. Then "a multitude that no man can number, of all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues, shall stand before him, and cry with united voices, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain! Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb forever! [Revelation 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-12); [Revelation 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9-10)."

We cannot more profitably **improve** this subject, than by inquiring:

1. What blessings have we received from Christ?

If we are indeed subjects of his kingdom, it cannot fail but that we must have received many blessings at his hands.

Has he then "blessed us" with the pardon of our sins?

Has he filled us with joy and peace in believing?

Has he endued us with grace and strength to subdue our spiritual enemies?

Has he transformed us into his own image in righteousness and true holiness?

This is the criterion whereby we must judge of our saving interest in him; for he cannot be a Savior to us, unless he saves us from the dominion of sin, as well as from the guilt of all our sins.

2. What is the disposition of our minds towards him?

Can we possibly be partakers of his benefits, and feel no disposition to "bless his name?" Surely a grateful sense of his goodness must characterize those who are so greatly indebted to him. To those who believe, he is, and must be, precious!

#622

PRAISE TO GOD FOR REDEMPTION

**[Psalm 72:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.18-19)**

"Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things; and blessed be His glorious name forever. Let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!"

Religion, as experienced by the generality, is selfish and superficial; it consists almost entirely in a desire to obtain mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, and an endeavor, through faith in him, and a surrender of the soul to him, to flee from the wrath to come.

The religion of the more eminent saints is of a more diffusive and sincere cast; it interests the soul in all that relates to God and to the world; it delights in heavenly contemplations; it surveys with wonder and gratitude all that God has done for a ruined world; and looks forward with holy joy to those richer manifestations of his glory, which, by all his holy Prophets and Apostles, he has taught us to expect. Of this kind was the piety of David, whose Psalms display a noble, generous mind, occupied with the honor of his God and Savior, and deeply intent on the welfare of the whole human race.

The Psalm before us was written, primarily, to describe the kingdom of Israel, as it should exist under the government of his son Solomon. But, beyond all doubt, a greater than Solomon is here; and it is the Messiah's kingdom to which David ultimately refers, and which alone fully corresponds with the description here given of it.

In our further elucidation of this truth, we shall consider,

I. The "wondrous things" here referred to.

These are particularly specified throughout the Psalm. We notice:

1. The **nature** of the Redeemer's kingdom.

It is truly a kingdom of righteousness and peace, verse 7. In it no law exists which does not tend to promote the best interests of him who obeys it, and of all connected with him. Nor are the laws recorded merely in books that are inaccessible to the great mass of the people; they are inscribed on the very hearts of the people themselves; to whom a disposition is given to love and obey them; so that every subject of the empire is made both holy and happy; and of every obedient subject the King himself espouses the cause; so that, however numerous or powerful his enemies may be, they shall all be subdued before him, and the great leader of them all be bruised under his feet! verse 4.

2. The **extent** of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Solomon's kingdom extended over the whole of that country which had originally been promised to Abraham; but the Messiah's shall embrace the whole earth, "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him! verse 11." "From the rising of the sun to the going down thereof his name shall be great among the Gentiles, [Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.11);" he shall have "the utmost ends of the earth for his possession, [Psalm 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.8);" and "all the kingdoms of the world become his" undivided empire, [Revelation 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 11.15).

3. The **means** by which the Redeemer's kingdom shall be established.

It was by the shedding of blood that David subdued his enemies, and conquered for his son that vast dominion; but it is not by carnal weapons that the Redeemer extends his empire. The Word of God is that sword whereby he "subdues the nations to the obedience of faith." The preachers of it go forth without any human aid, like sowers to sow their seed; and it is by "a handful of grain cast by them on the tops of the mountains," that the vast field is cultivated; so that "the fruit thereof shakes like the woods of Lebanon, and the converts spring up and flourish like the countless piles of grass upon the earth, verse 16." It is "a stone cut out without hands, that breaks in pieces all other kingdoms, and that fills the whole earth, [Daniel 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.34-35)."

4. The **duration** of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Solomon's kingdom endured but for a little time. His son and successor had scarcely assumed the reins of government, before ten tribes out of the twelve revolted from him, and have never since been re-united into one kingdom. But Christ's kingdom shall endure forever! [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44), even "throughout all generations! verse 5, 17."

The mode of administering the kingdom will be changed, when there shall be no more occasion for the exercise of the mediatorial office. Then, I say, "the kingdom shall be delivered up to God, even the Father," from whom it was received, [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14) with [1 Corinthians 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.24); 1 Corinthians 15:28. But of the kingdom itself there shall be no end; nor shall Christ ever cease to be the Head, the joy, the glory of his redeemed people, [Isaiah 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.7).

Such are the wonders here celebrated; and from the Psalmist we may learn,

II. The spirit with which the wonders of the Redeemer's kingdom should be contemplated.

The Psalmist closes his review of these wonders, as we also should do:

1. With grateful adoration to God as the author of them.

Truly, it is "God alone" who does these wonders. Whatever instruments he may make use of, the work is his alone, [1 Corinthians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.6-7); and his should be the glory. For these things he is adored in Heaven; and from us on earth should they call forth the devoutest acknowledgments. In truth, we should be even lost in wonder at the contemplation of them; that God should ever so pity our fallen world! That he should ever use such means for our deliverance from our great enemy! That he should send his own Son to die, and "by death to overcome him who had the power of death, and thus to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage!" What shall we say to these things? If they do not fill us with wonder and gratitude and praise, "the very stones may well cry out against us!"

2. With an ardent desire for the manifestation of them to the whole world.

However persuaded we may be of our own saving interest in these things, we should not be satisfied without seeing the whole world brought to the knowledge of them. We have a debt to God, and a debt to our fellow-creatures also; to Him, to glorify his name; to them, to diffuse as widely as possible among them the blessings of salvation. On both of these accounts, if there is a promise in God's Word to extend this kingdom, we should say "Amen" to it. If there is a proposal among men to aid its extension, we should add "Amen" to it. And to every effort that is made, in whatever way, we should say "Amen, and Amen."

We should long for the time, when "there shall be but one King upon all the earth, and his name One, [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.9);" when "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory," and "all men shall see the salvation of God."

But, in examining ourselves in relation to these things, have we not need to be ashamed?

How little sense have we had of these wonders; and of God's glory or man's happiness, as connected with them! If we might but be saved ourselves, it has been, with the generality among us, of little consequence whether God's glory were ever revealed to others, or his salvation experienced by others. Basely selfish as we have been, we need, every one of us, to be humbled in dust and ashes. O that we could imbibe a better spirit!

Dear brethren, let us henceforth determine, like David, to meditate on the wonders of God's love, [Psalm 77:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.11-13), and to recount them gratefully with songs of praise, [Nehemiah 9:5-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.5-24). Here the whole series of mercies, from the first election of the seed of Abraham to their complete establishment in Canaan, is distinctly mentioned, and might be very briefly noticed. Permit me to call upon you to bear your part, and to unite with me now in this blessed work. With David, I would say, "Blessed be you, Lord God of Israel, our father, forever and ever! Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty! Now therefore, our God, we thank you, and praise your glorious name! [1 Chronicles 29:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.10-11); [1 Chronicles 29:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.13)."

Having thus set the example, "David said to all the congregation: Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshiped, 1 Chronicles 29:20."

O that I might be alike successful!

O that this whole congregation might resemble them!

Truly, if you considered what a mercy God has given unto you, in "delivering you from the powers of darkness, and translating you into the kingdom of his dear Son," I should not plead in vain.

Let me then, in conclusion, first address our God in the words of David, "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto your holy name, and triumph in your praise!"

And now let me also, in the language of that same holy prophet, offer unto God the acknowledgment due unto his name, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Let all the people say, Amen Praise the Lord! [Psalm 106:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.47-48)."

#623

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO ISRAEL

**[Psalm 73:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.1)**

"Truly God is good to Israel—even to such as are of a pure heart!"

The aversion which men usually feel to a vindication of God's absolute sovereignty, proceeds from an idea, that the exercise of it would be repugnant to his other perfections of goodness and mercy. But there is no just foundation for this error; nor is there any reason why we should doubt the sovereignty of God, any more than any other of his attributes. That God does dispense his favors according to his own will is an undeniable truth; how else can we account for his taking one nation from the midst of another nation, and forming them for his peculiar people, and giving them his righteous laws, and expelling seven nations from the land of Canaan in order to give it to his chosen people for their inheritance?

But however freely God exercises his own prerogative in this respect, he will take care that his final appointment of men's states shall accord with perfect equity; he even calls the day in which that decision shall pass, "The day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

The truth is, that though God has no respect to men's moral characters in the first communications of his mercy, he invariably transforms the objects of that mercy in such a manner, as to make it suitable and proper that he should confer upon them the ultimate and everlasting tokens of his love. The Israel of old, and those to whom that name at this time belongs, were, and are, a chosen people; but all the true Israel are renewed in the spirit of their minds; they are "such as are of a pure heart;" and therefore they are such as may reasonably hope to experience the transcendent goodness of their God.

The words before us will naturally lead us to consider,

I. The character of **God's true Israel**.

"All are not Israel, who are of Israel, [Romans 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6)." The true Israel are widely different from those who are only "Israelites after the flesh."

They cannot however be known from others by their outward appearance. Others may be as modest in their apparel, and as humble in their looks, as they; and yet have no part with them in their more distinctive characters.

They cannot be distinguished from others by their language. There certainly is a mode of speaking which religious people will adopt; they will be sincere, modest, inoffensive; and will accustom themselves to such speech as, "being seasoned with salt," and is calculated to "administer grace to the hearers." But hypocrites may vie with them in this particular also.

Nor can they be altogether known from others by their actions; for though their actions will surely be holy, and just, and good, and extremely different from those of the ungodly world—yet Pharisees and formalists may "cleanse the outside of the cup and platter," and be as punctual and correct in all external duties as any people whatever.

The true Israelite is known by no external badge, but by "the circumcision of the heart" only. "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God! [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29)." He is of a pure heart!

1. He is pure from ***idolatrous*regards**.

The very best of ungodly men has some idol in his heart which usurps the throne of God. Pleasure, riches, and honor are the common objects of men's regards; but some, who seem indifferent to these things, are no less in subjection to a carnal love of ease, wherein their happiness principally consists. But the true Christian has taken the Lord for his God; and has determined, through grace, that no rival shall ever be harbored in his bosom. He makes his adorable Savior the one object of all his trust, his love, and his obedience! [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25).

2. He is pure from ***allowed*lusts**.

None but those who have embraced the promises of the Gospel have been able to "cleanse themselves from all fleshly and spiritual filthiness;" but "all who are really Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." We do not say, that Christians have no lusts remaining in them; (for a man that is crucified may still continue to live a considerable time; and the lusts that are crucified may still live and act,) but their lusts shall never regain the liberty which they once had; the death of their corruption is irreversibly decreed; and the strength of their lusts is gradually weakening; and in due time they shall utterly expire. In all other people, sin of some kind has dominion; but over the Christian "it shall not; because he is not under the law, but under grace."

3. He is pure from **sinister and selfish motives**.

All, even the most refined hypocrites, are under the influence of self-seeking and self-delight. But the true Christian endeavors to consult the glory of his God in all things. He is as jealous of his motives, as of his actions. He knows that SELF is but too apt to mix with what we do; and therefore he labors to counteract its influence, and to do his most common actions to the glory of his God, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God! [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31)"

To please God, to serve God, to honor God—these are the ends which he proposes to himself; nor is he ever satisfied with anyone action which has not these objects as their true and ultimate scope. He who is "an Israelite indeed, is an Israelite without deceit! [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)."

Let us now proceed to contemplate,

II. The character of **spiritual Israel's God**.

"God is good to all, and his tender mercy is over all his works;" but he is more especially good to his spiritual Israel; for,

1. God is **reconciled** to his spiritual Israel.

They once were under his displeasure, even as others; but he has given them repentance unto life; he has accepted them in and through his beloved Son; he has blotted out all their transgressions as a morning cloud. These are special mercies not given to others, whatever be their profession, or whatever their character.

2. God admits his spiritual Israel to most familiar communion with himself.

Others may have prayed in some peculiar extremity, and may have obtained deliverance from their distress; but "they will not always call upon God:" prayer is not their delight; nor have they any freedom of access to God in it.

But "the true Israel" are "a people near unto God." It is their delight to draw near to God at all times, to make known to him their requests on all occasions, and to walk continually in the light of his countenance. God, on the other hand, like a tender parent, condescends to hear and answer their petitions, and reveals himself to them as he does not unto the world!

Thus, while others perform prayer as a mere service which they would think it criminal to neglect, true believers account it their highest privilege to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ!"

3. God makes all things to work together for the good of his spiritual Israel

Many dark and afflictive dispensations do they meet with; but they all shall outcome in their good. Under the pressure of their trials they may be ready to say, "All these things are against me!" But they shall at last see reason to confess, that "it is good for them that they have been afflicted." God has expressly promised, that "all things shall work together for their good;" and he sooner or later fulfills the promise, to every one that loves him, and that trusts in him. The persecutions of men and the temptations of Satan shall ultimately conduce to this end: "The wrath of men and devils shall praise him; and the remainder of it," which would counteract his designs, "he will restrain."

4. God has prepared for a glorious and everlasting inheritance for his spiritual Israel.

To others he generally gives a greater measure of earthly wealth: but "for these he has prepared a glorious  inheritance city;" being "not ashamed to be called their God." The very hope and prospect of that far outweighs all earthly possessions. What then must the actual enjoyment of it be! With what emphasis do those in Heaven say, "Truly God is good to Israel!"

Well does David exclaim, "O how great is your goodness which you have laid up for those who fear you! [Psalm 31:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.19)." But we must wait until we come to Heaven, before we can form any adequate idea of this glorious subject.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are ignorant of God.

You are ready to think of God only as a harsh Master, and a severe Judge: but if you knew him aright, you would cry out, with the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" The fact is, that while your heart is so corrupt, you cannot form any correct judgment concerning God. Your eyes are jaundiced, and you behold all his perfections, yes, and his dispensations too, under false colors! "The light shines; but your darkness does not comprehend it." If you would know him as he is, pray that he would "create in you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you." Then shall you be disposed to admire the justice and holiness which you now hate, and, instead of denying his distinguishing grace, you will seek to obtain a saving interest in it. See [Psalm 106:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.4-5).

2. Those who are tempted to think harshly of God.

This had been the state of the Psalmist's mind, just before he penned this psalm: and it was on finding his error, that he abruptly exclaimed, "Truly God is good," notwithstanding all I have been tempted to think to the contrary.

The same temptations are common with us—and when we see the ungodly triumphing and the righteous afflicted, we are ready to say, "I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." But go into the sanctuary, as David did, and then you will learn the different ends of the righteous and the wicked. Take eternity into your estimate, and the delusion will vanish; and you will see, that no state in which an ungodly man can possibly be, is any more to be compared with yours, than the twinkling of a candle is with the light and splendor of the meridian sun!

#624

PROSPERITY OF SINNERS NOT TO BE ENVIED

**[Psalm 73:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.16-17)**

"When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me until I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny!"

To unenlightened man, there are numberless things in the dispensations of Providence altogether dark and inexplicable: it is the light of Revelation alone that enables us to form any just notions respecting them. Moreover, after that men are enlightened, they still are liable to be disconcerted and perplexed by the events which daily occur, in proportion as they lean to their own understandings, and neglect to avail themselves of the means which are afforded them for the regulation of their judgment.

Nor has Satan any more powerful instruments with which to assault the minds of believers, than those which he derives from this source. The temptation with which he assaulted our first parents in Paradise, was furnished by the prohibition which God had given them to eat of a certain tree; "Has God said: You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" insinuating, that such a prohibition could never have proceeded from a God of love. In like manner, if God have seen fit to deny his people any particular comfort which he has given to others, or allowed them to be afflicted in any respect more than others, Satan suggests to their minds: How can these dispensations consist with his professed regard for you as his own peculiar people? Thus their subtle adversary would instill into their minds hard thoughts of God, and a distrust of his providential care. It was in this way that he assaulted the author of the psalm before us, and caused him almost to renounce his confidence in God. The Psalmist himself (whether it were Asaph, or David, we cannot certainly declare) tells us, how nearly he was overcome by this temptation: "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well near slipped: for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He proceeds more fully to state the difficulty with which his mind was harassed, and the way in which the snare was broken: and as the subject is of universal interest, we will draw your attention to it, by stating,

I. The difficulty.

It is frequently seen that the wicked prosper, while the godly are grievously oppressed.

The godly are for the most part "a poor and afflicted people, [Zephaniah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.12)." They are objects of hatred and contempt to an ungodly world, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19), and they suffer much from the unkind treatment which they meet with, 2 Timothy 3:12. Frequently, "their greatest foes are those of their own household." From the hand of God also they receive many strokes of fatherly correction, from which the avowed enemies of God are in great measure exempt, [Hebrews 12:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6-8). It is necessary also, with a view to the accomplishment of God's purpose of love towards them, that they should, for the most part, "be in heaviness through manifold temptations, 1 Peter 1:6."

The wicked, on the contrary, frequently pass through life without any particular trials verses 4, 5. And having nothing to humble them, they are lifted up with pride, (which they glory in as their brightest ornament, [Daniel 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.29) with verse 6.) They are often encompassed with violence, as their daily habit. They gratify their sensual appetites, "until their eyes stand out with fatness verse 7." They despise all restraint, whether human or divine verses 8, 9. Mark the language of verse 9; and even atheistically question whether God notices and regards the conduct of his creatures verse 11.

These are the persons who generally get forward in life, and engross to themselves the wealth and honors of a corrupt world. Doubtless, in countries where the rights of individuals are secured by just laws and a righteous administration, this inequality will be less apparent, than in places where there is more scope afforded for the unrestrained exercise of fraud and violence: but in every place there is ample evidence, that worldly prosperity is the attainment, not of spiritual, but of carnal minds.

This, to the carnal mind, presents a difficulty not easy to be explained.

There is in the mind of man a general idea that the Governor of the universe will testify by his present dispensations his love for virtue, and his hatred of iniquity. The friends of Job carried this notion so far, that, without any other evidence than what arose from his peculiar trials, they concluded, that he must of necessity have been a hypocrite and deceiver, whom justice at last had visibly overtaken.

Nor could Job himself understand, how it should be that the prosperity of the wicked should be so great, while he, who had walked in his integrity, was so overwhelmed with troubles! [Job 21:7-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.7-13). Even the Prophet Jeremiah, who might be supposed to have a deeper insight into divine truth than Job, was stumbled at the same thing, [Jeremiah 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 12.1); and therefore we must not wonder that it operates as a temptation in the minds of the generality.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, the difficulty of accounting for these things was certainly very great: for all the sanctions of the Law were almost, if not altogether, of a temporal nature. Temporal prosperity was promised, and that too in very general and unqualified terms, as the reward of obedience. And temporal judgments were threatened as the punishment of disobedience. Consequently, when the wicked prospered and the righteous were oppressed, it seemed as if the providence of God were in direct opposition to his Word.

Nor did Moses alone give ground for such expectations: even David himself had said, that "those who sought the Lord should lack nothing good, [Psalm 34:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.10); [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11)." Nay more, the same language is used in the New Testament: If we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all earthly comforts shall be added unto us." And again, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth [Matthew 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.5); [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33)."

Now it may be asked: How can this consist with the exaltation of the wicked, and the almost universal depression of the righteous, of whom it may be said, that "they are plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning! verse 14."

But the Psalmist, having stated his difficulty, gives us,

II. The solution.

To the carnal mind the difficulty is insurmountable: but "if we enter into the sanctuary of God," it will vanish instantly. There we shall see the lamentable state of the wicked in the midst of their prosperity:

1. The danger of their way.

"Their feet are set in slippery places," where it is, humanly speaking, impossible for them to stand. This may appear a strong assertion; but it is not at all too strong—it is the assertion of our Lord himself, [Mark 10:23-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.23-27)

Indeed, it is with great justice said by Solomon, that "the prosperity of fools destroys them, [Proverbs 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.32);" for it almost universally generates those very dispositions which are so strongly depicted in the psalm before us verses 6–11. If riches increase, we are immediately ready "to set our heart upon them, [Psalm 62:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.10)," and to trust in them rather than in God, [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17). [Luke 12:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.19). They foster pride in the heart of the possessor, [Proverbs 18:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.23); and frequently lead to an oppressive conduct towards the poor, [James 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.6), and to the most daring impiety towards God, [James 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.7).

Are they then to be envied, who are placed in such perilous circumstances? Or are they to be envied, who, when running for their lives, have "their feet laden with thick clay?" Be it so, that the rich have many comforts which the poor taste not of—but what enjoyment can that man have of a feast, who sees a sword suspended over his head by a single hair, and knows not but that it may fall and pierce him the very next minute!

In the same way, the godly man who knows his own weakness, and the force of the temptations to which he may be exposed, will be well satisfied to have such a portion of this world as God sees fit to give him; and will abundantly prefer the eternal welfare of his soul before all the gratifications that wealth or honor can afford him!

2. The awfulness of their end.

As God raised up Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, with an intent to show forth in him his wrathful indignation against sin, [Romans 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17)—so he loads with temporal benefits many, who shall finally be made objects of his heavy displeasure for their abuse of them. He bears with them for a season: but "their feet shall slide in due time! [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35);" and then "they will be cast down into everlasting destruction! verse 18." O how terrible is their transition in a single instant, from a fullness of all earthly comforts—to an utter destitution! verse 19. even of "a drop of water to cool their tongue!"

Think of the rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day; what a change did he experience the moment that his soul departed from the body! The next thing we hear of him is, that "he was in Hell, lifting up his eyes in torment!" such as no words can describe, and no imagination can conceive! [Luke 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.23-24).

Lazarus, on the contrary, who in this world had not even the most common necessities of life, was enjoying unspeakable and endless felicity in Abraham's bosom.

Who that beholds the termination of their lives, would not infinitely prefer the temporal estate of Lazarus, even though it should last a thousand years, before all the vanishing gratifications of the man of wealth? If it should be thought that this rich man was more addicted to sin than others, the account we have of him suggests no ground for it whatever. On the contrary, it tells us, that his five surviving brethren, who inherited his wealth, were, like him, yielding to the sad influence of the temptations which it offered, and therefore were hastening to that same place of torment, to which he had been consigned! [Luke 16:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.27-28).

Doubtless it is painful to reflect on the thoughtless security of millions, who, if not guilty of any flagrant enormity, have no conception of the predicament in which they stand. But the Scripture speaks too plainly on this subject to admit of any doubt, [Psalm 92:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 92.7). [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.4-7); [Job 21:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.30). [Proverbs 23:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.17-18). Say then, Are these to be envied? Alas! if viewed aright, they must be regarded only as persons accumulating wrath upon their own heads! [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5); or as victims fattening for the slaughter! [James 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.1-3); [James 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.5); and consequently, their superior prosperity in earthly things affords no ground for complaint to the godly, however destitute they may be, or however afflicted.

Let us **learn** then from this subject,

1. To mark the motions of our own hearts.

We greatly deceive ourselves if we imagine that our actions afford a sufficient criterion for judging of our state state before God. There are many who indulge in all manner of evil thoughts, while yet they are restrained by merely social considerations from carrying them into effect. While therefore men may see nothing amiss in us, God may see our "hearts to be full of evil."

It was not any overt act that the Psalmist spoke of in our text, but of his thoughts only; and yet he acknowledges, that they had well near destroyed and ruined his soul, verses 2, 3.

O let us observe from time to time the various thoughts that arise in our corrupt hearts:  
the proud thoughts,  
the vain thoughts,  
the envious thoughts,  
the angry thoughts,  
the vindictive thoughts,  
the impure thoughts,  
the hateful thoughts,  
the covetous thoughts,  
the worldly thoughts  
—and let us humble ourselves for them in dust and ashes, and pray, that "the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven! [Acts 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.22)."

If we view ourselves as we really are in the sight of God, we shall see that we may, on many occasions, justly, and without hyperbole, say, "So foolish am I and ignorant, I am even as a beast before you! verse 22."

2. To be satisfied with our condition.

To Judas was consigned the custody of the money bag provided for the daily support of our Lord and his disciples. What if the other disciples had envied him that honor? would they have been wise? Judas was a thief: and the pre-eminence he enjoyed, afforded him an opportunity of gratifying his covetous desires, while the rest were free from any such temptation.

God knows that many of those things which we would gladly enjoy, would only prove snares and temptations to our souls. He sees, not only the evil that does exist within us, but the evil also that might arise within us: and he withholds in mercy many things, which he knows would be injurious to our spiritual welfare.

How happy would it have been for the Rich Youth in the Gospel, if, instead of being possessed of wealth, he had been as poor as Lazarus! It was his wealth alone that induced him to forego all hope of a saving interest in Christ, [Mark 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.22); and, if he had been a poor man, he might, for ought we know, have been at this moment a blessed inhabitant of Heaven.

Let us then remember, that if God sends us trials which we would gladly escape, or withholds comforts which we would desire to possess—that he does it in wisdom, and in love: and we shall one day see reason to adore him for the things which we now deplore, as much as for any of those benefits in which we are most disposed to rejoice.

3. To seek above all things the prosperity of our souls.

Here is full scope for our ambition. We may "covet, as earnestly as we will, the best gifts." We must not indeed grudge to any their higher attainments: but we may take occasion from the superior piety of others to aspire after the highest possible communications of grace and peace. Were we to possess the whole world, then we must shortly leave it all, and "go just as naked out of the world as we came into it."

But if we possess spiritual riches, then we shall carry them with us into the eternal world, and have our weight of glory proportioned to them!

The operation of these truths upon our souls needs not to be feared: they bring no snare with them; or, if they are accompanied with a temptation to pride, they will lead us to Him, who will assuredly supply an antidote, to screen us from its injurious effects, [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-9). If we are "rich towards God," then we are truly rich! Yes, though we possess nothing in the world besides, we may exult, as "having nothing, and yet possessing all things! [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)."

#625

THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE AND HOPES

**[Psalm 73:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.23-24)**

"Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory!"

There are in the Holy Scriptures many expressions which are difficult to be reconciled with each other. For instance, the Psalmist, in the very words before my text, says, "So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before you." Yet behold, in the text itself, he speaks as one enjoying the sublimest communion with his God, and possessing a most confident expectation of his favor.

Now, how is this to be explained? The fact is, that he had been sorely tempted to envy the ungodly world, when he saw how prosperous they were, in comparison with many of God's most faithful servants. But when he reflected on "the end" that awaited them, he condemned his former thoughts, as betraying rather the ignorance of a beast than the judgment of a real saint; and then he encouraged himself as elevated far above the most prosperous of ungodly men, in that, whatever he might lack in this world, he possessed God himself for his friend, his counselor, his everlasting portion!

I shall take occasion from these words to consider the saint in,

I. The Christian's **present** experience.

Here we see the saint with his God, in a way of humble dependence; and his God with him, in a way of effectual support.

1. The saint with his God in a way of humble dependence.

Numberless are the difficulties with which the Christian is encompassed, while yet in himself he has no power to surmount the smallest of them. In fact, he has to wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but with all the principalities and powers of Hell itself! What then shall he do? How shall he entertain a hope of a successful outcome? He would sit down in utter despair, but that he remembers he has with him, at all times, a Friend, who is almighty, and all-sufficient for him.

He has been taught to look unto God as his Father in Christ Jesus.

He has been assured, that, since he has fled to Christ for refuge, and sought for reconciliation with God through Him, he is entitled to regard God as a friend, and to commit into his hands his every concern.

Hence he becomes composed, in the midst of all his trials; and comforts himself with the reflection: 'I am continually with my God; I see him ever present with me; confiding in him, I have no fear. It is a small matter to me what confederacies there may be against me; having him at hand, I need no other help; I therefore repose all my confidence on him, and "cast all my care on him.'

2. God with his redeemed child, in a way of effectual support.

To enter fully into this idea; conceive of a child passing over rocks where there is scarcely room for his feet; and where the path is so slippery, that it is scarcely possible for him to stand; and where there are precipices on every hand so steep and tremendous, that a single false step must of necessity cause him to be dashed in pieces. Conceive a father guiding his beloved child in all this way, "holding him by his right hand," that he may not fall; and raising him up, if at any time he has fallen; and preserving him from all the dangers to which he is exposed.

Here you see our God with the believing soul. Not for a moment does he leave the trembling saint; and it is altogether in consequence of this effectual help that any saint in the universe is enabled to pursue his way. Hence every child of God ascribes his safety to him who has thus upheld him; and with sincere gratitude exclaims, "My foot stands fast; in the congregation I will bless the Lord! [Psalm 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.12)."

In unison with his present experience, are,

II. The Christian's **future** prospects.

"Knowing in whom he has believed," he expects.

1. God's guidance in all his way.

In addition to all the difficulties of his journey, he knows not what way he is to pursue. He has a general notion of his path; but an infinite variety of circumstances occur from time to time, to render it difficult to discern which is the way in which it will be best and safest for him to proceed. He is aware that one single step may lead to consequences inconceivably important.

Joseph was sent to visit his brethren. The step was good; but oh! to what a diversity of trials did it lead! [Genesis 37:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.14).

David also was sent to visit his brethren; here too the step was good; and from it resulted the victory over Goliath, and the deliverance of Israel from their oppressors! [1 Samuel 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.20). In the consciousness that God alone can guide him, he asks counsel of the Lord every step he takes; and God grants to guide his feet into the way of peace.

There are many different means which God is pleased to make use of for the direction of his people:  
sometimes he guides by his Word;  
sometimes by his Spirit;  
sometimes by his providence, opening or shutting a door, as is pleasing in his sight; diversifying these as he sees occasion, he accomplishes his gracious ends; just as, in the days of old, he led his people Israel through the trackless wilderness, until they came in safety to the Promised Land.

The entire process may be seen, as it were, realized in actual life. Behold the saint's desire of counsel, as expressed in the prayers of David, [Psalm 143:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.4-8); and mark the accomplishment of that desire in the consolations and encouragements administered to the waiting soul, [Isaiah 41:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10-15); And this is exactly what every believing soul is warranted to expect, "I will instruct you, and teach you in the way you shall go; I will guide you with my eye! [Psalm 32:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.8)."

2. Glory at the end!

Never will God cease from his offices of love, until he has completed all his gracious purposes, and fulfilled the utmost desires of those who wait upon him. Glory is that to which every soul looks forward, as the consummation of its bliss; that is "the joy that is set before us, the prize of our high calling," "the recompense of our reward;" and God will not allow his people to come short of it. "He will fulfill in them all the good pleasure of his goodness," until the work which has been begun in grace is consummated in glory. Of this Paul was confident, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6); and in the prospect of it every believing soul may rejoice, even as if he were already in possession of the full result!

"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

[Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39)."

See, then, the Christian's life exhibited before you.

1. The Christian's life is **an arduous life**.

The people of the world imagine it an easy thing to get to Heaven; but the real saint finds it far otherwise. The worldling glides down the stream in a way of carnal gratification; but the Christian has to go against the stream of corrupt nature, and to stem the tide of a voluptuous world. Were it so easy a matter to serve the Lord, it would never have been characterized by terms which convey so different an idea. The wrestler, the racer, the soldier, find that they have enough to do, in order to obtain a successful outcome to their exertions.

2. The Christian's life is **a watchful life**.

The apostle Paul says, "I would have you without anxiety." But our Lord says, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." Unbelieving anxiety is surely to be put away; but watchfulness and holy fear are never to be intermitted one single moment. Peter knew, by bitter experience, how needful that caution was, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour!"

It would ill befit a man on the borders of eternity to indulge a careless frame of mind. The most eminent saint in the universe should "take heed lest he fall," and should "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

3. The Christian's life is **a happy life**.

It should seem as if concern were inconsistent with happiness. And it would be so, if we knew not where to look for the grace that is needful for us. But the very trials which drive us to our God for help, are the means of drawing forth the supports which God has promised, and of bringing God himself into closer union with us.

In truth, it is from such discoveries of the divine character, and such communications of the heavenly grace, that the believer derives his sublimest pleasures; and he is then most truly happy, when "his fellowship is most intimate with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ! [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3)."

4. The Christian's life is **a glorious life**.

To the eye of sense, a believer is only like a common man, and his life like that of other men; but to the eye of faith it is not so. A believer walks with God; his soul is brought into closest union with God. What has been said of a father and a son, does but very faintly convey what actually passes between God and him. There is, on the one part, the entire dependence of his soul on God; and, on the other part, the tender care of a father exercised towards him in every step he takes.

Throughout the whole of his life is this continued, until the period has arrived for his being invested with all the glory and felicity of Heaven. And is not this a glorious life:  
ordered as it is by the Father;  
exampled by the Son;  
effected by the Holy Spirit;  
begun in grace;  
and consummated in glory?

Think what you will, this is a glorious life indeed! It is a life which even an angel might desire! It is a life which is, in some respects, more glorious than that of angels, inasmuch as it is the effect of Redeeming Love, and will issue in louder songs of praise and thanksgiving, than the angels, who never experienced such trials, will ever be able to sing!

#626

THE CHRISTIAN'S CHOICE

**[Psalm 73:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24-26)**

"You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in Heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!"

This evil and deceitful world promises happiness to its votaries; and men, naturally carnal and earthly, are too willing to be deceived by it. Even the godly themselves are sometimes drawn aside by the world's glittering delusions; but when the snare is broken, they see, and lament their folly! "I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you! [Psalm 73:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.22)." David contrasted the mirth of the wicked with the troubles he had to conflict with, and was ready to conclude that the wicked had a better portion than himself, verses 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14. But on deeper investigation, he found that their happiness was soon to end! verses 17-20. Whereas, however difficult his path at present was, God would guide him safely to the regions of eternal felicity! verse 23, 24.

Hence, as the result of his more deliberate judgment, he determines to take God as his only portion.

I. The Christian's choice.

By nature, the Christian does not at all differ from those who are still in darkness. He once chose the world as the portion in which his soul delighted, but now he renounces it as sincerely as he ever loved it.

He does not indeed treat it with stoic indifference. He knows that wealth and honor are capable of important uses, and that, if God bestows them, they may be enjoyed, [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17). But he is well assured that they are not a satisfying portion; he is persuaded that our cares increase with our possessions, "As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? [Ecclesiastes 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.11)", and that Solomon's testimony respecting the world is true, "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun! [Ecclesiastes 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.11)."

God is the supreme object of the Christian's choice.

Before his conversion he could think as lightly of God as others, [Job 21:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.15), but grace has altogether changed his opinions and desires! God appears to him now exceeding great and glorious. The love of God in sending his own Son to die for us, has made an indelible impression on his mind. Since the Christian has been enabled to see this mystery, all created beauties have vanished as the stars before the sun. There is nothing "on earth" which, in his eyes, can stand for one moment in comparison with his incarnate God. The pleasures, riches, and honors of the world seem lighter than vanity. By the cross of Christ he is utterly crucified to them all! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14). Without the Savior's presence, there would be nothing desirable even "in Heaven" itself; the glorified saints and angels would have nothing to attract the soul, nor would the bright regions in which they dwell, be any better than darkness itself. Created glory would be utterly extinguished, if the Sun of righteousness were withdrawn! [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23). The Christian has all in God; without him nothing.

Nor is this an exaggerated description of the Christian's character.

The children of God in all ages have been of one mind in these respects. Though their attainments have been different, their aims have been the same.

David frequently expresses, in yet stronger terms, his desires after God, [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2); [Psalm 63:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-2), and declares that he coveted nothing so much as the divine presence, [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4).

Paul had as much to glory in as any man whatever—yet he despised it all as dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8).

Nor were these views peculiar to these distinguished servants of God, they were common to all the saints in the days of old, [Isaiah 26:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.8-9); nor is there a true Christian now, who, if interrogated respecting true happiness, would not reply in the language of the Psalmist, "Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD! [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)."

However foolish such a choice may be thought by a blind and sensual world, it is perfectly rational and wise.

II. The reasons for the Christian's choice

Whatever men choose, they invariably choose it under the idea that it is good for them. Now there is no created good that can be at all compared with God:

1. God is an **ever-present** portion.

We may possess many things—yet not have them with us in the time of necessity. Yes, we may be utterly deprived of them by fraud or violence. But God is everywhere present to afford us help; though we be immured in a dungeon, he can visit us; nor can any human power intercept his gracious communications. This was a reflection peculiarly grateful to the Psalmist, [Psalm 139:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.7-10), and, doubtless, was an important ground on which he fixed his choice, [Psalm 139:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.17-18).

2. God is an **all-sufficient** portion.

A man may enjoy all which this world can bestow, but: What can it avail him while racked with excruciating pains?

What relief can it afford him under the agonies of a guilty conscience?

Or what can it do to appease the fears of death?

But there is no situation wherein God is not a suitable portion. In the possession of earthly blessings, God's presence will greatly enhance our enjoyment of them. In the absence of all temporal comforts, with him we can feel no lack, [1 Corinthians 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-23) and [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10). A view of God as our friend will allay every fear, and assuage every pain; nor, having him, can we lack any other thing that is truly good for us, [Psalm 34:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.9-10).

3. God is an **eternal** portion.

However long we retain earthly things, we must part with them at last. Death will reduce us to a level with the poorest of mankind, nor can we carry anything along with us into the invisible world! [Psalm 49:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.17). But, if God is ours, we shall possess him forever. We are not left without many rich communications from him now; yes, sometimes, even in this valley of tears, our joy in him is unspeakable, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8). But it is not until after death that we shall have the full enjoyment of him. Now we taste of the streams; then we shall drink at the fountain-head. Now our capacity to enjoy him is but small; then all our faculties will be wonderfully enlarged. Now our delight in him is transient; then it will be without intermission or end! [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11). Hence the Psalmist looked forward to that period for his full satisfaction, [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15).

INFERENCES.

1. How little true piety there is in the world!

If to be called after the name of Christ were sufficient, his flock would be large. If to attend his ordinances and profess his faith were enough, there would be many on the way to Heaven. But God will judge us, not according to our professions, but our practice. That, which alone can constitute us truly pious, is, to choose God for our portion. Can we then, like David, appeal to God himself, that we do this? Could we make Peter's reply to the question which was put to him, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love yo! [John 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.17)." Does the ardor of our devotions attest the strength of our desires after God? Have we the same evidence of our supreme regard for him, that the sensualist or worldling have of their love to the things of time and sense? Let us be assured that God can never be our portion, unless we deliberately choose him in preference to all others.

2. How enviable is the true Christian!

He can adopt the language of David, [Psalm 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.5), and of the ancient church, [Song of Solomon 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.10). Hence, however destitute he may seem to be, he needs envy none; he is freed from the cares which corrode the hearts of others; he is sure, not of attaining only, but of possessing forever, the object of his desires, and that, in proportion as he delights in God, his God will delight in him! [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17). Surely we cannot but subscribe to the truth of that assertion, "Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD! [Psalm 144:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 144.15)."

Let us then beg of God to deliver us from the love of this present evil world, and so to cast the mantle of his love upon us, that we may both follow him and serve him forever!

#627

BENEFIT OF DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

**[Psalm 73:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.28)**

"It is good for me to draw near to God!"

The dispensations of Divine Providence are often so dark and inscrutable, that the proud man is ready to question the wisdom of them, and almost to doubt whether they are the result of design or chance. The prosperity of the wicked is more particularly a stumbling-block to those who limit their views to the things of this life. But a more enlarged acquaintance with God and his ways will silence every cavil, and oblige us to confess, that however "clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and justice are the basis of his throne!"

The Psalmist himself for a season was unable to account for the prosperous state of the ungodly, while the righteous were regarded by them as objects of contempt and abhorrence. His reasonings upon the subject could not satisfy his mind; but at last he "went into the sanctuary of God," and there learned to estimate the ways of God by a very different standard, and to think those the most happy who were *happy for eternity*. In the review of this experience, he was led to acknowledge the more than brutish stupidity of his soul, verse 22, and the benefit which he had received from drawing near to God, "It is good for me," says he," "to draw near to God."

In discoursing on these words, we shall show,

I. What is meant by drawing near to God.

We must not suppose that any bodily motion is necessary in order to the drawing near to God; since he fills all space, and is "never far from anyone of us, [Acts 17:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.27)."

1. The expression in the text imports a drawing near to God with the **mind**.

Though "God is a Spirit," and therefore not to be apprehended with bodily eyes—yet man is able, by the exercise of faith, to place him as it were before the eyes of his mind, and thereby to "see Him who is invisible, [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27)." Nothing can be more absurd or delusive, than to draw a picture of him, as it were, in our imagination, and to present him before us in a way of vision. Whatever visions were granted to men in former times, it is rather a sense and consciousness of his presence, than a sight of him as present, which we are to expect. We must not look for such a luminous appearance as Moses saw; but it is our privilege to say with David, "I have set the Lord always before me! [Psalm 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.8)."

When, we set God before us, we also set ourselves before him; we summon ourselves into his presence; and endeavor to impress our minds with the conviction that he discerns our inmost thoughts.

In this way we may properly be said to draw near to him; because, though in fact we are no nearer to him than before—yet we are much nearer in our own apprehension; and the effect upon our own minds is precisely the same as if the approximation were real.

2. The expression in the text imports a drawing near to God with the the **heart**.

The drawing near to God is not a work of the understanding only, but also of the heart, [1 Corinthians 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.15); and the exercises of the one are as necessary as those of the other. Indeed the idea of approaching God without suitable affections, is vain; since man cannot remain unaffected in the Divine presence; nor would he be approved of God if he did. It is obvious therefore that an acceptable approach to God must be attended with such emotions as befit a sinner in the presence of his Judge, and a redeemed sinner in the presence of his Lord and Savior. It must be accompanied with:  
a fear of God's majesty,  
an admiration of his goodness,  
a trust in his mercy,  
a love to his name,  
a submission to his will,  
a zeal for his glory.  
Those various feelings must be expressed in such petitions and acknowledgments as the occasion requires.

In short, our drawing near to God must somewhat resemble Esther's approach to Ahasuerus. She knew that none but the king could help her; and that she must perish if she did not obtain favor in his sight; and therefore, with much preparation of mind, she humbly presented herself before him, and then offered her petition in the manner she thought most likely to prevail, [Esther 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 5.1-4). [This whole head might be changed; and, instead of it, one might show, How we are to draw near to God. This would be more in the common-place way; but it would be easier, and perhaps more profitable to the lower class of hearers.]

Having ascertained the import of drawing near to God, we proceed to show.

II. The **benefits** arising from drawing near to God.

There is no other thing under Heaven so "good for" the soul, as this! [Lamentations 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.25)

1. There is nothing so **pleasant** as drawing near to God.

We will grant, for argument sake, that the things which this world afford are capable of imparting as much happiness as the votaries of pleasure expect; still the happiness of drawing near to God is incomparably greater. We appear indeed to "speak parables, [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.49)" when we descant on such a subject as this, because the things we affirm can be known only from Scripture and experience; and people have an easy way of setting both of these aside. The words of Scripture are represented as high eastern metaphors; and the experience of the primitive saints is supposed to be confined to the earlier ages of the Church.

And with respect to the experience of living saints, that is derided as wild enthusiasm. But there is a blessedness in communion with God, whether man will admit it or not.

To the ungodly it is an irksome task to approach God; but to the godly it is their chief joy. The Psalmist justly says, "Blessed is the man, O Lord, whom you chose, and cause to approach unto you! [Psalm 64:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 64.5)."

But how shall we describe this blessedness? How shall we paint the lowly self-abasing thoughts which lead a man to prostrate himself in the very dust before God? How shall we express the wonder and admiration with which he is filled, when he contemplates the goodness of God towards him? How shall we declare the ardor of his feelings when he is adoring that Savior who bought him with his blood? We do not say, that any man feels at all times the same rapturous and exalted joys; but we do say, that the joys of those who live near to God are at some seasons "unspeakable and full of glory [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)," a pledge and foretaste of Heaven itself!

2. There is nothing so **profitable** as drawing near to God.

Not to mention the pardon and acceptance which flow from communion with God, it is certain that it will restrain from sin. The presence of a fellow-creature, yes, even of a child, will restrain men from the commission of crimes, which in secret they would perpetrate without remorse! How much more then would a consciousness of God's presence awe us, if we felt it as we ought! [Psalm 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.4). The falls and apostasies of those who profess religion always originate from, or are preceded by, a secret departure of the heart from God!

Communion with God will also console us in trouble. David, both on this and many other occasions, found prayer the best means of composing his spirit when it was harassed by temptations or persecutions, verse 3, 13, 17. See also [Psalm 69:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.17-18); [Psalm 116:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.3-5). Has anyone ever apply this remedy in vain? When we have complained to man only, we have felt the pressure of our burdens still, and groaned under them as much as ever; but when we have carried our complaints to God, we have almost invariably had:  
our murmurs silenced,  
our agitations tranquillized,  
and our spirits comforted.

God has fulfilled to us his promise, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear you, and you shall glorify me! [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.15)."

Communion with God will moreover strengthen us for duty. We would not so often faint in the way of duty, if we waited more constantly upon our God. He "would renew our strength as the eagle's! [Isaiah 40:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.31);" he would "give us more grace! [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6)," even "grace sufficient for us."

However weak we are in ourselves, we would be "able to do all things through the strength which he would impart unto us! [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)." By drawing near to God:  
our humility is increased,  
our faith is invigorated,  
our hope is quickened,  
our love is inflamed, and  
the whole work of grace is advanced in our souls!

Lastly, communion with God will prepare us for glory. Nothing transforms us into the Divine image so much as nearness to God. When Moses continued with God for a season upon the holy mount, his face contracted a radiance which was visible to all who beheld him.

And though no bright effulgence will now adorn the countenances of those who live near to God—yet a glory will shine around their paths, a luster which will compel others to "take notice of them, that they have been with Jesus! [Acts 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.13)." By "beholding his glory they will be changed into the same image, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)," and be progressively fitted to "see him as he is! [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2)."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who never draw near to God at all.

How many are there of this description! You rather say to him in your hearts, "Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways! [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14);" and, in so doing, you pass sentence upon yourselves; you even inflict on yourselves, by anticipation, the punishment prepared for you! [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41). God assures you, that "all who are far from him shall perish! verse 27." O that you might tremble at the denunciations of his wrath, and not bring upon yourselves the bitter experience of it in the eternal world!

2. Those who draw near to him, but only in a **formal**manner.

Your state is as dangerous and deplorable as if you lived ever so far from God; for it is to no purpose to "draw near to him with your lips, while your hearts are far from him! [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8-9)." "Bodily exercise profits nothing, [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8);" you must have "the power of godliness as well as the form, [2 Timothy 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5)." "God is a Spirit; and, if you do not worship him in spirit and in truth, [John 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.24)," then your service is a mockery, and your hope a delusion.

Be in earnest therefore in your walk with God; for as your formal duties, whether in the Church or closet, bring with them neither pleasure nor profit, so will they ultimately deceive you to your ruin!

On the contrary, if you really draw near to God, and "stir up yourselves to lay hold of him," then he will draw near to you, and load you with his richest benefits! [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8)."

3. Those who find their happiness in communion with God.

This is the character of all the saints, "they are a people near unto God, [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14);" "truly their fellowship is with God, and with his Son Jesus Christ, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3)." It is true, that there is no merit in this; and it arises only from the grace of God, which effectually works in them. Nevertheless God admires and applauds their conduct; viewing them with a kind of rapture and surprise, he says, "Who is this that has engaged his heart to approach unto me! [Jeremiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.21)." Happy, happy are the people who can say, "Lord, it is I!" "Lord, it is I!"

Continue then and increase your diligence in walking with God. Then you shall not only say now, "It is good for me to draw near to God;" but you shall one day add with ten-fold emphasis, "It is good for me to have drawn near to God!" Yes; if now you can look back upon your seasons of communion with God as the best and happiest hours of your life—then much more shall you, when your fellowship with him shall be more immediate, and you are dwelling in the very bosom of your God!

#628

GOD'S INTEREST IN HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 74:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 74.22)**

"Arise, O God! Plead your own cause!"

No one can have ever heard or read the account given us of Abraham's intercession for Sodom, without being struck with the condescension of God in allowing a poor sinful worm so to urge his requests as to make every fresh concession an occasion of still larger demands. Yet, methinks, the petition offered in my text is incomparably more bold than perhaps any other that was ever offered by fallen man.

In unfolding this petition, I will show you:

I. That there is **an identity of interests** between God and his people.

This the Psalm before us clearly proves.

Great was the distress of God's people at the time it was written; they appear to have been forsaken of their God, and delivered over into the hands of their enemies. But the writer speaks, throughout the Psalm, as if their cause was God's; and calls upon God to take it up altogether as his own, "Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? Remember the people you purchased of old, the tribe of your inheritance, whom you redeemed—Mount Zion, where you dwelt! [Psalm 74:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 74.1-2)." "Have respect unto the Covenant, verse 20." "Arise, O God! plead your own cause."

Who would imagine that this is the address of a sinner imploring mercy for himself and for his people? Yet such it is; and this clearly proves that God considers his people's cause as his own, and their interests as identified with his.

The whole Scriptures also speak to the same effect.

When the people murmured against Moses, he warned them that their murmuring was not against him, but against God himself! [Exodus 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.8). When the people of Israel desired to have no longer a judge, like Samuel, but a king, like other nations around them, Samuel told them, that it was not him who they had rejected, but God, 1 Samuel 8:7.

The Prophet Zechariah confirms this, in terms peculiarly strong and energetic, when he represents God as saying to his oppressed people, "He who touches you, touches the apple of my eye! [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)."

Our blessed Lord and Savior speaks to the same effect; and so identifies himself with his people, that, whether they be benefitted or injured, he considers it as done to himself. Is any poor servant of his clothed or fed or visited, Christ says, "In doing it to him, you did it to me, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40)." On the other hand, is anyone of them oppressed, Christ feels the stroke as inflicted on himself, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me! [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4)."

This being clear, I proceed to show,

II. Whence this identity arises.

1. This identity arises from the relation in which they stand to God.

In the Psalm before us this is strongly marked. The Jewish nation being "his sheep," "his congregation," "his inheritance," was a reason why he should consider "their cause as his own." The whole people of Israel were accounted by God as "his portion and inheritance," and the more pious part of them as "his peculiar treasure" and "his jewels." Yes, he accounted himself as their Father, and them as his children.

Now, is there a parent in the universe who, if his child were injured, would not account the injury as done to himself? We wonder not, then, that God should regard his children's cause as identified with his own.

2. This identity arises from the union which exists between them and the Lord Jesus Christ.

They have been "bought with the precious blood of Christ," who therefore considers them as "his own, [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)." And how near their union with him is, may be seen by the images under which it is described.

He is "the foundation" on which they stand [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5), and consequently one with the superstructure built upon him.

He is "the Husband" of his Church, and therefore one with his spouse, [Ephesians 5:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.32).

But the union is far closer than this; for "He is the vine, and they are the branches," vitally united to him, and deriving all their sap and nourishment from him, [John 15:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.4-5).

But neither does that come up to the full idea of our union with him; for "we are members of his body, even of his flesh and of his bones, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30)," yes, and are also "one Spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17)," he being "the very life that lives in us, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4) and [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

In fact, there is no union with which it can be compared, but that which exists between the Father and Christ! [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21); and hence Paul calls the collective members of his body by the very name of Christ, "As the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ, [1 Corinthians 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.12)." That is, so also is the Church of Christ, which is so identified with him, that it may well bear his very name. How can it be, then, but that he should make our cause his own?

3. This identity arises from the connection which there is between **their prosperity** and **his glory**.

When God threatened to extirpate Israel for their heinous provocations, Moses urged on God the consideration of his own glory, which would suffer, if that threat were carried into execution, [Exodus 32:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.11-13). [Numbers 14:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.13-16). On the other hand, God's honor is represented as greatly advanced by their welfare. If they flourish as "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3)," and "bring forth much fruit, God is glorified, [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.8)."

Hence, in the book of Psalms, this consideration is urged with earnest importunity as a plea for speedy and effectual relief, "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins for your name's sake. Why should the heathen say, Where is their God? [Psalm 79:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 79.9-10)."

In a word, as children by their conduct may reflect either honor or disgrace upon their parents according as that conduct may deserve—so God himself participates in the honor or disgrace of his people, "being blasphemed," when they violate their duty, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4); and lauded, when they approve themselves faithful in the discharge of it, [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14).

This point being clear, let us consider,

III. The **use** which we should make of it in our addresses at the throne of grace.

We should plead with God precisely as the Psalmist does in the words of our text. Whatever is the pressure under which we labor, whether it be from men or devils, we shall do well in offering up this prayer: "Arise, O God, and plead your own cause!"

Let us suppose a person bowed down with a sense of sin, and an apprehension of God's heavy displeasure—is that a case wherein this plea may be urged? Yes, assuredly; for so it was urged by the Church of old, in language peculiarly strong, and, I had almost said, presumptuous, "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against you. Do not abhor us, for your name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of your glory; remember, break not your covenant with us, [Jeremiah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.20-21)."

Precisely thus, however, may we also address the Father of mercies; for he has covenanted to receive all who come to him humbly in his Son's name; and if he should cast out one, he would violate his covenant, and "disgrace the throne of his glory!"

In like manner, if we are suffering under persecution, we may come to God in this very manner, and entreat him to plead his own cause, "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help; draw out also the spear, and stop the way against those who persecute me; say unto my soul, I am your salvation …. This you have seen, O Lord; keep not silence; O Lord, be not far from me! Stir up yourself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God, and my Lord! [Psalm 35:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.1-3); [Psalm 35:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.22-23)."

There can be no situation whatever, where this plea is not proper; nor any in which it shall not prevail, if it is offered in humility and faith.

1. A word of **caution**, however, may not be unseasonable.

It may be supposed, that, while we thus consider God as engaged to help us—then we are at liberty to sit down in sloth and inactivity. But God will help those only who endeavor, as far as they are able, to help themselves. Hence, when the Church of old cried to him, "Awake, awake! O arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old!" he replied, "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem!" and again, "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! [Isaiah 51:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.9); [Isaiah 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.17); [Isaiah 52:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.1)."

The paralytic, notwithstanding his impotence, endeavored to put forth his arm; and in that effort he was healed, [Matthew 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.13). And so also shall it be with us; let us labor to the uttermost to maintain our own cause, and God will then both make it his own, and plead it for us.

2. A word of **encouragement**, at all events, must not be omitted.

If God makes our cause his own, what have we to fear? for "who can be against us, if He be for us?" Let our Savior's consolations in the depth of all his troubles be applied by you for the comfort of your own souls, "The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

He is near who justifies me.  
Who will contend with me?  
Who is my adversary?  
Who is he who shall condemn me?  
Behold, the Lord God will help me!

Lo, they all shall wax old us a garment; the moth shall eat them up, [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9)." Rely on God thus, and all will be well; for of "those who thus trust in God, not one shall ever be confounded!"

#629

GOD GREATLY TO BE FEARED

**[Psalm 76:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.7)**

"You, even you, are to be feared! Who may stand in your sight, when once you are angry?"

There is not only a generally prevailing notion that God is merciful, but the consideration of his mercy is with many, a ground and reason for dismissing from their minds all concern for his displeasure. But it is not in this partial view that God is represented in the Scriptures of truth; on the contrary, the whole sacred records bear witness to him as a God who is greatly to be feared. On many occasions has his indignation against sin and sinners been most awfully displayed; as when, in one single night, he slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army, who had besieged Jerusalem and defied his power. It was probably on that occasion that the Psalm before us was written; and in reference to it was this testimony given, "You, even you, are to be feared; and who may stand in your sight, when you are angry?" To establish and confirm this sentiment, is my purpose at this time.

I. To **establish** the fact the God is greatly to be feared.

But where shall I begin? or where shall I end? Of course, it is but a very partial view of this subject that can be presented in one discourse. Let us, however, notice,

1. What God is in himself.

If we contemplate his natural perfections, we shall see this truth in very striking colors.

He is omnipresent, so that we can never escape from him for a single moment.

He is omniscient, so that there is not so much as a thought of our hearts which can be hidden from him.

He is omnipotent also, to deal with men according to their deserts.

His moral perfections, too, are well calculated to impress our minds with awe. So holy is he, that "he cannot behold iniquity" of any kind without the utmost abhorrence. He is so just, that he cannot but enforce on men the observance of his laws, and execute his judgments upon them for every act of disobedience. And so unalterable is his truth, that sooner should Heaven and earth pass away than one jot or tittle of his Word should fail. Say, then, whether such a God is not greatly to be feared.

2. What he has recorded respecting his dealings with mankind.

Behold Adam in Paradise; he violated the command which had been given him respecting the forbidden tree; and how was he dealt with? The curse of God came upon him instantly; and he was driven from Paradise, and with all his posterity subjected to misery both in this world and the world to come.

See the whole race of mankind after they had multiplied and filled the earth; they had provoked God to anger by their abominations; and he swept them all, with every living creature, from the face of the earth—a remnant only in the ark excepted, by a universal deluge.

Trace God at subsequent periods; his judgments upon Sodom and all the cities of the plain; his wonders in Egypt; his judgments on all his own chosen people in the wilderness; his extirpation of all the nations that inhabited the land of Canaan. In a word, see his dealings either with nations or individuals, and you must come speedily to this same conclusion, that he is a God very greatly to be feared!

3. What he has taught us to expect at his hands.

He has told us plainly, that "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, even all the nations that forget God! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)." He has said, that "he will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; and that this shall be their portion to drink! [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.6). See also [Revelation 14:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.9-11)."

And what is the feeling which such declarations should inspire? Even in Heaven itself they connect with these views the fear of God; saying, "Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, O King of saints! Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name! [Revelation 15:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 15.3-4)."

As plain and undeniable as this sentiment is, I will nevertheless proceed,

II. To **confirm** the fact the God is greatly to be feared.

Here is an appeal to every man, "Who shall stand before God, when once he is angry?"

Indeed, God is angry with those who are disobedient to his laws.

Of course, we are not to conceive of God as under the influence of such a feeling as we call anger; but he will surely act, in reference to sinners, as men do against those who have excited their displeasure; and this we call a manifestation of his anger. To this effect the Psalmist speaks, "God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn, he will whet his sword; he has bent his bow, and made it ready; he has also prepared for him the instruments of death! [Psalm 7:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.11-13)."

And who may stand in his sight, when once his anger is excited?

Not even the angels in Heaven could abide his wrath, when once they had kindled his indignation against them; how much less, then, can man, who is crushed before the moth! [2 Peter 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4). Shall it be thought that any man is so holy, as not to deserve God's anger? Vain imagination! Fatal conceit! "There is no man who lives and sins not." "In many things we all offend, [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2)." "If any man says he has not sinned, he makes God a liar, [1 John 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.10)." Even Job himself says, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me; if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse, [Job 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20)."

But possibly it may be thought that God will never proceed to extremities with all the human race; and that, consequently, if we are as good as the generality of people—then we have nothing to fear. This, however, is a fatal delusion; for already is death inflicted upon all as the wages of sin; and on all who die in impenitence and unbelief will his judgments fall, even the destruction of body and soul in Hell!"

APPLICATION.

1. Let the ungodly, then, seek reconciliation with God.

Indeed, indeed, you have angered the Most High God, all you who have lived unto yourselves and not unto him. But is there no way of reconciliation with him? Yes, blessed be his name! he has given his only dear Son to bear your sins in his own body on the tree, and to effect reconciliation for you through the blood of his Cross. Yes, and he has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, and commissioned us to proclaim, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." We are happy to announce that, however you may have angered God in past times, you may yet find mercy with him through the Son of his love. In the name of Christ himself, then, we address you; and in his stead we beseech you all, "Be reconciled to God! [2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.18-20)."

2. Let the godly forbear to anger him any more.

Though God will be merciful to his repentant people, he will not spare any who continue to live in sin. No, he commands "every one that names the name of Christ to depart from iniquity." And so far will he be from overlooking sin in his professing people, that he has declared, "His judgments shall begin with them, 1 Peter 4:17;" "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities, [Amos 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.2)."

Presume not, then, upon your being in his favor, as though that would preserve you from his judgments; for I tell you, that of all who came out of Egypt, only two were allowed to enter into the land of Canaan; and the only evidence of real friendship with God, is the keeping of God's commandments, and the doing unreservedly whatever is pleasing in his sight! [John 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.14)."

#630

DESPONDENCY DEPICTED AND REPROVED

**[Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-10)**

"Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Selah Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High."

It pleases God to deal with men in a great variety of ways.

Some, in their bodies, experience scarcely any pain or sickness until the period of their dissolution; while others know little of health or ease through the greatest part of their lives.

In like manner, the souls of some enjoy an almost uninterrupted course of peace and prosperity; while others are made to pass through deep waters, and to sustain fiery trials during a great part of their earthly pilgrimage. It is of these last that we propose at this time to speak.

The afflictions of Asaph were certainly exceeding heavy; and the account, which in the preceding verses he gives of himself, shows that he may well be considered as a mirror, wherein the Lord's people in all ages may, under their several temptations, behold the workings of their own minds.

Scarcely anyone can experience a sorer temptation than Asaph's. When he wrote this Psalm, he was brought through it, verse 1; but he tells us faithfully, what were his views and feelings under it. He sought the Lord without intermission; but found no comfort, verse 2; his very recollections of God's character contributed only to augment his grief, verse 3. To such a degree was his spirit oppressed, that he was deprived of all rest by night, and of all power of friendly communication by day; and he altogether sunk under his trouble, verse 3, 4. In vain did he call to mind the consolations he had enjoyed under former trials, verse 5, 6, or examine to find the causes of this peculiar dispensation verse 6; he thought surely that God himself must have changed, and have cast off that character, which, in appearance at least, he had on all former occasions exhibited; yes, God's darling attributes of mercy and truth seemed to have undergone a change, and to have assumed an aspect totally different from that in which they had hitherto been viewed, verses 7-9.

Happily, however, the snare was broken; and he saw that these hard thoughts of God had no foundation in truth; they were the result only of his own weakness, verse 10; and would be effectually removed by a more attentive consideration of all that God had done for his people of old, verse 10-20.

His temptation was at its height, when he asked the questions recorded in our text. We shall do well therefore to consider:

I. What Asaph's questions signify.

They are not to be viewed as subjects of a merely speculative inquiry, but to be taken in connection with all that agitation of mind that is depicted in the foregoing context. In this view they express,

1. Asaph's questions signify disquieting apprehensions in reference to himself.

He had thought in former times, that he was a monument of God's "mercy," and an object of his "favorable" regard; but now he seems as one cast out, and doomed to everlasting misery. It must be remembered that interrogations, which in our language would imply a negation of the thing inquired about, have frequently in Scripture the force of affirmations, [Jeremiah 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.14); [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20); and thus it is in the various questions that are before us, in which therefore there is a very strong degree of apprehension intimated.

Yet this feeling by no means uncommon at the present day. Many in a season of darkness are led to write bitter things against themselves, and to account all their past profession a continued scene of hypocrisy and self-delusion. They think that they have resisted the Spirit, until they have utterly quenched his sacred motions; yes, that they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, and placed themselves, as it were, out of the reach of mercy; and such an unhappy degree of darkness frequently accompanies these apprehensions, that they read their doom as if it had been already past, and disregard all means of grace as though it were utterly in vain to use them.

2. Asaph's questions signify desponding fears in reference to God.

He properly referred everything to God as the one source of all good; but instead of deriving comfort from this, he made it an occasion of increased despondency. And thus it is with many, "They remember God, and are troubled." Every attribute of God is brought against them, to aggravate their guilt and ensure their condemnation. Even mercy and truth are regarded by them as arrayed in hostile attitude against them, and as uniting their influence on the side of offended justice. His paternal corrections are considered by them as judicial inflictions, and as the forerunners of yet heavier judgments in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. His delays in answering prayer are viewed as absolute refusals, and as decisive proofs of final doom. Hence their fears are vented in terms similar to those in the passage before us, "I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall!" [Lamentations 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.17-19).

An apprehension of the true import of these questions will enable us to discover,

II. Whence Asaph's questions proceed.

Justly did Asaph say, "This is my infirmity;" and a grievous infirmity it was.

1. Such questions as Asaph's arise from **impatience**.

There is great impatience in the mind of man, yes, even of godly men, and especially under any dark and mysterious dispensation. We are apt to think that God is, as it were, bound to hear us, and to interpose, either for the solution of our difficulties, or the removal of our trials, as soon as we call upon him. We cannot wait God's timing. Like Saul, we think he has forgotten us; and, that our enemies will crush us, before he can come to our relief, [1 Samuel 13:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 13.12-13), Thus David was exercised, as he himself tells us, "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before your eyes! [Psalm 31:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.22)." To such a degree was he agitated on one occasion, that he declared that it was altogether in vain that he had served God, "Truly I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence! [Psalm 73:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.13); [Psalm 73:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.21)."

And, as for all that God's saints had spoken from the beginning of the world respecting the grace and mercy and fidelity of God, he did not hesitate to pronounce it all a downright falsehood, "I said in my haste, all men are liars, [Psalm 116:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.11)."

The Prophet Jeremiah, too, cast reflections even upon God himself, as having deceived him by false promises, "You have deceived me, and I was deceived, [Jeremiah 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 20.7)." Alas! what a root of bitterness is an impatient spirit! How greatly does it aggravate the calamities under which we suffer! Surely we should leave times and seasons, whether of trial or consolation, unto God, and say, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him! [Job 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.15)."

2. Such questions as Asaph's arise from **unbelief**.

This is the great source of all our disquietude. If we truly believe that God ordered everything with infallible wisdom, and unbounded goodness, and an inviolable fidelity—then we could never be put into such a consternation as is expressed in our text. We should rather lie as clay in his hands; and leave him to fashion us according to his will, and to put us into as many successive furnaces as he sees fit, and to accomplish his own purposes in his own way. We should have it fixed as an immutable principle in our minds, that though "clouds and darkness may be round about him—justice and judgment are the basis of his throne;" and under the influence of this certainty, we should adopt the language of the Prophet Habakkuk, and say, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty—yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights! [Habakkuk 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-19)."

Happily the same authority that points out the source of these questions, shows us also,

III. How Asaph's questions should be answered.

Would we know what God will do—then we should attentively consider what he has done. We should mark his wonders of old, and observe all the diversified exercises of his perfections towards his people from the beginning of the world, and especially towards the Israelites whom he redeemed from the land of Egypt:

1. How mighty is his **power**!

When the moment for the deliverance of his people was arrived, not all the power of Egypt could detain them. Difficulties indeed were multiplied, but only for the purpose of displaying more gloriously his power in their behalf. The Red Sea obstructed their flight; but it opened at God's command, and made for his people a passage on dry ground; and then closed again to overwhelm their enemies.

Their necessities in the wilderness were such as no human power or wisdom could supply; but this also only tended in the same manner to proclaim His might, who for the space of forty yean fed them with bread from Heaven, and with water out of the stony rock, and caused their garments never to decay.

Be it so then, that our difficulties are great, yes, insuperable by human power; then God will magnify towards us his power so much the more, and show, that still, as in former times, he "makes the depths of the sea (not a place for his people to be drowned in, but) a way for the ransomed to pass over, [Isaiah 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10)."

2. How rich is his **mercy**!

Truly it was "not for their righteousness that he brought them out; for they were a stiff-necked people" from the very beginning; and "many a time would he have consumed them for their iniquities, but for his own name's sake, that it should not be dishonored among the heathen." See their murmurings, their idolatries, their innumerable provocations, and then say, whether God's grace be not sovereign, and his mercy infinite? And, if such surmises as those suggested in our text arise in our minds respecting him, let us remember, that he is the same God now as in former ages; and that now, as well as in former times, the very chief of sinners, if truly penitent, shall be accepted by him; and that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound! [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20)."

3. How mysterious are his ways!

In the space of a few months God had brought his people to the borders of Canaan; and yet for their murmuring and unbelief he turned them back into the wilderness, and caused them to wander there forty years, until all that generation, excepting two people, were swept away. This was most mysterious; yet are we told on infallible authority, that "He led them by the right way." In truth, that dispensation has afforded the richest instruction to the Church from that period to the present hour, and will continue to do so to the end of time; and it will be found that his darkest dispensations towards us also are the most replete with instruction to our souls.

It is usually those who are most exercised with trials, that know most of themselves, and most of God. Whenever therefore his dealings with us appear strange and inexplicable, let us compose our minds with the reflection suggested toward the close of this Psalm, "Your way is in the sea, and your path in the great waters, and your footsteps are not known! [Isaiah 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10)."

4. How sure are his promises!

He had pledged himself to Abraham, that he would bring his posterity into the full possession of the Promised Land; and, though for their iniquities he caused all who came out of Egypt to die in the wilderness—yet he brought their children, who they supposed would fall an easy prey to their enemies, into that good land, and gave it to them for their inheritance; and so perfectly did he fulfill his Word to them in every respect, that Joshua after many years could appeal to the whole nation, that "not one thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord their God had spoken concerning them; all was come to pass unto them, and not one thing had failed thereof! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

Thus, if the thought arises in our hearts, "Is his mercy clean gone forever? Does his promise fail for evermore?" Our answer must be, "No!"

"It is impossible for God to lie! [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18);"

"His promises in Christ are all yes, and amen! [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20);"

"His mercy endures forever! [Psalm 136:1-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 136.1-26)."

Address,

1. Those who are walking in darkness.

There are changes in the spiritual, as well as in the natural world. None of us must expect that our sun shall shine equally at all times with unclouded splendor. Notwithstanding we may truly "fear God and obey the voice of his servants, we may yet be walking in darkness and have no light."

But in that state we are directed what to do; we must "trust in the Lord, and stay upon our God! [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10)." The longest night will have an end; and if we wait patiently upon our God, "his way is prepared as the morning," which, though the night appear exceeding long and tedious, will come at last, [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.3). He may for wise reasons hide his face from us for a time; but it shall not be forever, [Isaiah 54:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-8). Hear his own answer to the complaints which we are apt to make, [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16); And know, that though "heaviness may endure for a night, joy shall surely come to us in the morning! [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5)." if only we wait until the appointed hour, "our light shall rise in obscurity, and our darkness shall be as the noon day, [Isaiah 58:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10)."

2. Those who enjoy the light of God's countenance.

O what a privilege, what an unspeakable blessing, is this! Learn to value it aright; and take care that you do not presume upon the mercy given unto you. Do not be saying with David, "My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved," lest you provoke "God to hide his face from you, and you be troubled, [Psalm 30:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.7)."

A slavish fear is surely to be avoided on the one hand; but so is a presumptuous security on the other. The true medium is, to "rejoice with trembling, [Psalm 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.11)," and to unite "the fear of the Lord with the comforts of the Holy Spirit, [Acts 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.31)." Be watchful then, that you do not by any unhallowed dispositions "grieve the Holy Spirit [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30);" but endeavor to "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long, [Proverbs 23:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.17)."

#631

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS COMPARED

**[Psalm 78:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.8)**

"A stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him."

History is universally considered as a source of the most valuable instruction, since it sets before us the actions of men, under all the most important circumstances of life, and teaches us what to avoid, and what to follow.

But in this point of view the inspired history is of incomparably greater value than any other, because it portrays the conduct of men under an infinitely greater variety of circumstances than any other history can do, and does it also with far greater truth and certainty. Its importance in this respect is strongly marked by the Psalmist in the preceding context. He calls on the whole Jewish nation to listen to him, while he sets before them the dealings of Jehovah with their ancestors, and their conduct towards him; and he charges them to impart the information to their children, in order to its being transmitted through successive generations to their last posterity; that all might learn their obligations to God, and be instructed to avoid the evils into which their ancestors had fallen, "that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and might not be, as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him."

With a view to a similar improvement of the subject for ourselves, I will point out,

I. The character of **that** generation.

To estimate this aright, we must consider what might reasonably have been expected of them.

No nation under Heaven were ever so distinguished by the Divine favor as they.

The wonders that were wrought for them in Egypt;  
their passage through the Red Sea, in which the enemies who followed them were drowned;  
their being guided by a cloud which afforded them shade by day, and light by night;  
their being nourished for forty years by bread from Heaven, and by water, which, issuing from a rock, followed them in all their way;  
their having the Law written by the finger of God himself given them, together with laws and ordinances for the political and religious government of their nation;  
their having the river Jordan open a passage for them as the sea had formerly done;  
the seven nations, greater and mightier than they, all subdued before them;  
the promised land in due time put into their possession;  
and the worship of God, with all its attendant privileges and blessings, established among them.

These were favors peculiar to that nation, and elevated them above all other people upon the face of the earth.

Respecting their superior obligations to love and serve God on account of these things, Moses made an appeal to their forefathers, which appeal may still be made to their descendants at the present day, "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other! [Deuteronomy 4:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.32-35)."

Now, I ask: What might reasonably be expected of a people so favored? Might it not be supposed, that they would:  
love their God supremely,  
and cleave to him steadfastly,  
and trust in him confidently,  
and serve him with their whole hearts?

One would think it impossible that they would do otherwise, if we did not know that the very reverse of this characterized their whole deportment!

Their whole history from the beginning records, is one continued series of murmurings and rebellions in Egypt itself, and within a few days after their passage through the Red Sea. But how shall I recite all their provocations? I must recite their whole history, if I would bring before you the full extent of their wickedness.

Now and then they seemed to manifest a better spirit. When they saw all their enemies dead upon the sea-shore, they began to sing praise to their almighty Deliverer; and on some occasions, when he punished them for their rebellions, they manifested some contrition, and promised to amend, verses 34-37. But they soon returned to their former habits, and "turned aside like a deceitful bow," which, when promising to carry the arrow to the mark, causes it to drop at your very feet, verse 57. At no time did they evince any real desire "to set their heart aright;" and, when they professed any such purpose, they soon forgot their engagements, and showed, that "their spirit was not steadfast with their God."

Now from having so complete a knowledge of them, we are ready to imagine that they were as far beyond all others in depravity as they were in their privileges! But, that we may do justice to the character of that generation, let us proceed to consider,

II. The character of **our** generation.

The favors conferred on us are as superior to any bestowed on them, as it is possible to conceive!

Their redemption was from oppressive task-masters; but ours is from sin and Satan, death and Hell.

Their redemption was accomplished by power only; ours by a price surpassing all calculation, even the inestimably precious blood of God's only-begotten Son.

Their redemption was for a time in the earthly Canaan; ours for eternity in Heaven.

Their redemption was a mere shadow; ours is the substance.

What then may God reasonably expect of us?

Suppose we could divest ourselves of all recollection that we were a party concerned in this matter, and were called upon to give our opinion as to how any people, so favored as we have been, might be expected to requite their heavenly Benefactor. What answer would we give? Would we not say:

There will be no bounds to their gratitude;

they will adore their God day and night;

they will almost grudge a moment that is not spent in his praise;

they will commit all their concerns to him with a confidence which nothing can shake;

they will devote themselves to him with an ardor which nothing can abate;

they will be wholly his—in body, soul, and spirit;

they will look for his presence and his blessing as the only portion of their souls!

And how is it actually, with us?

How is it with the generality of people today?

Do they "set their heart aright" towards him?

Is there in their hearts any real determination to live to him, and for him, as their rightful Lord and Master?

Is there any decided purpose to secure a saving interest in Jesus' redemption above all else?

Do they desire to live entirely on him, who has lived and died for them?

Let me rather ask: Is there any concern about their heart at all? Provided only they are moral in their lives, and regular in church attendance—do they not think themselves at liberty to set their affections on things below, instead of setting them primarily for things above? See, in their converse with the world—how little they savor of Heaven and heavenly things! See them even in their religious worship, (whether in the closet, or the family, or the public assembly)—how cold and formal all their services are; performed from a sense of duty, rather than from inclination; and with a view to satisfy their conscience, rather than to enjoy and glorify their God!

In a word, instead of pointing like the needle to the pole, their heart rests indifferently in any other position than the right one; and never, unless from some forcible impulse, and for a moment, points towards God as its rest at all!

How is it with the greater part of those who profess to be Christians? As the former "set not their heart aright," so these "in their spirit are not steadfast with God." What lamentable instability is found in many who embrace the Gospel as a system, and number themselves among the Israel of God!

They "name the name of Christ; but do not depart from iniquity;"  
they "profess to know him; but in works deny him;"  
they "have a name to live; but are really dead;"  
or, if they did "run well, it was only for a season;"  
they are soon diverted from their course;  
they are drawn aside by temptation;  
and though they "begin in the Spirit, they end in the flesh."

Thus it was in the Apostle's days; and thus we are taught to expect it will be in every age, until that blessed period shall arrive, when "all nations shall serve the Lord," and "the Canaanite no more be found in the house of the Lord Almighty."

The good-ground hearers are but few, in comparison with those whose unfruitfulness or instability disappoint the efforts of the laborer.

Discontent with respect to what God has done, and distrust as to what he will do;  
a love of present gratifications, and a contempt of future good;  
a renunciation of God himself, for base and worthless idols

—are not evils peculiar to that generation. They exist and operate among ourselves with undiminished force; and in the conduct of the Israelites we have a mirror wherein we may see our own faces, with the exception of a few who serve God in spirit and in truth.

There is indeed, thanks be unto God! "a generation of righteous" people, who are truly "upright," and truly "blessed, [Psalm 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.5); [Psalm 112:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.2)." But, for the most part, the present generation has little reason to boast against that which is mentioned in our text. Yes rather, inasmuch as our privileges exceed theirs, and our obligations to holiness are greater, it may well be doubted whether we are not more criminal than they; and whether they in the day of judgment will not rise up against us and condemn us!

Address,

1. Those who are satisfied with themselves.

We are told that "there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness, [Proverbs 30:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.12)." Yes, thousands are well satisfied with themselves on account of their *outward morality*, though they have no real spirituality of mind, nor radical devotedness of heart to God. But let it be remembered, that "God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart!" He "requires truth in the inward parts."

And to the heart must we also look; for "as a man thinks in his heart—so is he." I mean not that we should take no notice of our actions; because if they are bad—then our hearts must of necessity be bad also; since it is "out of the abundance of the heart that we both speak" and act.

But actions, though good in appearance, will not suffice to prove our integrity before God. By the heart alone, he judges; (acts are regarded only as proofs and evidences of our inward state,) and according as that is found upright or hypocritical before him, will our sentence at his tribunal be.

Let us then look well to the truth of our profession, and to the stability of our ways. Let us see to it, that our "heart is set aright" to glorify his name, and that our spirit is steadfast with him, whatever temptations or difficulties are put in our way. For then only "have we a good hope," when we are "Israelites indeed, and without deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)."

2. Those who are conscious of their departures from God.

To see that we have erred from his ways, is the first step towards a return to him. If you see then a resemblance between yourselves and the Jews of old, be thankful that "God has not yet sworn in his wrath that you shall not enter into his rest." And without delay flee to the Savior, "whose blood will cleanse you from all sin." Yet be not content to have your sins forgiven. When you pray with David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean," "wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," forget not to add, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" "The old heart must be taken away, and a new heart be given to you," before you can enter into the kingdom of Heaven. You must be born again, and become "new creatures in Christ Jesus."

You must become the very reverse of what the world is: regarding God, as they regard the world; and the world, as they regard their God. When they are in holy exercises, they are quite out of their element; but when engaged in worldly pursuits or company, they are quite at home. On the contrary, be strangers in the world, and at home with God. Let your whole life and conduct testify for you, whose you are, and whom you serve; and then will God acknowledge you as his in the eternal world!

#632

THE EVIL OF UNBELIEF

**[Psalm 78:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.19-22)**

"They spoke against God, saying: Can God spread a table in the desert? When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply food for his people?"

When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance."

Human nature is the same in all ages. On a comparison with ourselves with the ancient Jews, we are ready to suppose that we are better than they. But, if we were subjected to the same trials as they, and as faithful a record were kept of all the workings of our hearts, perhaps our incorrigible perverseness would be found to be equal or worse than theirs.

I. Their murmuring manifests an evil heart of unbelief.

Unbelief often assumes the garb of humility. But the evil of it appears,

1. From the construction which God himself has put upon it.

He says, "They spoke against God," when they questioned his power to give them food. And this is what we do, whenever we call in question God's power to effect anything which our necessities require. He has declared himself to be possessed of all power in Heaven and in earth, "I am the Almighty God! [Genesis 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.1)." But when we limit his power, we represent him as unworthy of our belief; or, as John strongly expresses it, "We make him a liar! [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10)." We may not intend to cast this reflection upon him; but we do it; and, in fact, reduce him to a level with his creatures!

As for our acknowledgments of his past interpositions, these aggravate, rather than excuse, our doubts of his power; since they are standing witnesses for him; and our doubts are entertained in direct opposition to their testimony. Let us not, therefore, imagine that the giving of glory to God for past favors, will at all palliate our refusal of credit to him for the future; for, on the contrary, he will rather say to us, "Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you calumniator of your God!"

2. From the indignation which God manifested on account of it.

"When he heard these unbelieving doubts, he was angry; and so a fire was kindled in Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel," and "he smote them with a very great and fatal plague! [Numbers 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.33)." Now, it is true that we do not see the same displeasure exercised on us; but we can have no doubt but that our unbelief is as offensive to God as theirs was. Indeed, it involves us in deeper guilt; because his mercies to us, in our redemption by Christ, infinitely exceed all which the Jews experienced in the wilderness. And, if we still harbor unbelief in our hearts, it will bring down a proportionably heavier judgment than what theirs brought on them.

They were excluded from the earthly Canaan for their unbelief; but we shall be excluded from Heaven itself, and from the everlasting enjoyment of our God! [Hebrews 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.19); [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1); [Hebrews 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.11)."

Seeing, then, that unbelief is so offensive to him, let us note that,

II. God approves a heart and mind of faith.

This is clearly intimated in our text; His anger was kindled against Israel, "because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation." Of all the images that human wisdom can suggest, no one can be devised so complete as that before us, for the purpose of illustrating a life of faith.

The people of Israel were brought out of Egypt, but:  
they knew not one step of the way that they were to take;  
they were not provided with any sustenance;  
they were incapable of protecting themselves against any enemy;  
they had to pass through a country infested with wild beasts, and full of obstacles apparently insurmountable!

Consequently, they had to trust to God for everything from day to day; and, in dependence upon him, to expect a successful termination of their labors in a peaceful enjoyment of the Promised Land. A new-born infant was not more incapable of providing for itself than they; yet were they to prosecute their journey without fear, and without any apprehension respecting its final outcome.

Now this is precisely the frame of mind which God expects from us. We must feel our dependence on him as much as they did. We must look to him in every difficulty; and expect from him a supply of every need; and never move, but as guided and directed by him. If trials arise, they must drive us all to him, and lead us to expect from him the more visible manifestations of his power and love. If he delays, we must wait his time. If he appear for a time to have forgotten us, we must regard it only as a call to give him a more abundant measure of glory, by a full persuasion, that "in the mount of difficulty, he will be seen;" and that, though he were to allow us all to perish, he would rather raise us up again from the dead than fail to accomplish anyone of his promises! Such was Abraham's faith; and such should be ours also, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19); and "sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away" than one such believer ever fall short of the promised inheritance.

And now let me address,

1. Those who **murmur**.

Alas! to what an awful degree has discontent raged in our hearts under circumstances of trial; so that we have dared to question, not only the willingness of God, but even the power of God to relieve us! Nay, we have even, like Jonah, vindicated our complaints, and thought that "we did well to be angry."

But remember, brethren, that God is the disposer of all events; and, while you vent your rage against those who may have been accessary to your troubles—that your murmuring is in reality against God. Beware, I beg you, lest you provoke him to anger, and bring down upon your souls his heavy displeasure. Your wisdom and your duty is, under every affliction, to "be silent before God," or to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him!"

2. Those who **doubt**.

You limit the mercies of your God. "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I have a child, who am old? [Genesis 18:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.12-13)." And why do you allow any difficulties to shake your confidence in God? "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?"

Peter, when he saw the waves, began to sink through fear. But our Lord reproved him, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

So then I say to you: Look only to the promises; and do not think whether they be more or less difficult of accomplishment; but take them; plead them; rest on them; expect the fulfillment of them; and be assured, that "not one thing shall fail, of all the good things which the Lord your God has promised to you! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)." "Faithful is He who has called you; who also will do it [1 Thessalonians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.24)."

3. Those who are **true believers**.

"Hold fast to your confidence in God." This will bring peace unto your souls, and will give glory to your God. Of all the graces that have been ever exercised by the Lord's people, no one has been so much noticed, and so highly applauded by him, as faith. Even when as bright an assemblage of graces as ever were united, were called forth into exercise by the penitent Mary, nothing but her faith was noticed by our Lord, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace! [Luke 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.50)." In fact, as it is that which, more than any other grace, honors God—faith beyond every other grace, shall be honored by him. "Be strong then in faith, giving glory to God!" "According to your faith, it shall be unto you."

#633

OBSTINACY IN SIN REPROVED

**[Psalm 78:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.32)**

"For all this, they still sinned!"

The history of the Israelites in the wilderness should not be considered as the history of that people only, but of human nature in general. In this view, it is pre-eminently instructive; because it serves as a *mirror*, to reflect our own selves, and to show us what is actually passing in our own hearts. In illustration of this remark, I will set before you,

I. The state of Israel in the wilderness.

It is plainly depicted in the Psalm before us. It was one continued contest between God and them: God endeavoring, by mercies and judgments, to reclaim them from their evil ways; and they determinately persisting in their rebellion against him.

1. They had begun their wickedness early.

While they were yet in Egypt, where, as might be supposed, they were led to commit idolatry—God had endeavored to withdraw them from it. He had revealed himself to them as the God of their fathers; and had urged them to cast away their abominations and their idols. But they would not hearken unto him; on the contrary, so obstinately did they adhere to their idol worship, that, had it not been for his own great Name's sake, which would have been dishonored among the heathen—God would have cut them off from being a nation, and have utterly destroyed them from the face of the earth! [Ezekiel 20:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.5-9).

When Moses had clearly proved to them his divine mission to deliver them, they murmured at the delay which Pharaoh's obstinacy had created, and made their augmented trials an occasion of utter despondency, [Exodus 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.20-21).

After all the wonders that had been wrought in Egypt before their eyes, and they were brought out with a high hand, no sooner did they see fresh perils arise, than they renewed their murmurings with augmented vehemence, and complained that they had been betrayed to their utter ruin, [Exodus 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.11-12).

Nor did even the passage of the Red Sea, and the sight of all their enemies dead upon the sea-shore, cure them of this propensity; for they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people even to the end! [Deuteronomy 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.7).

2. They continued in their wickedness with scarcely any intermission.

For a little moment "they believed the words of God, and sang his praise, [Psalm 106:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.12);" but "they soon forgot his works, [Psalm 106:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.13)," and provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea, [Psalm 106:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.7)."

Read their history, of which a summary is given in the Psalm before us, and you will find it to be one continued series of murmurings and rebellions. Dissatisfied with the provision which God gave them in the wilderness, they invidiously contrasted with it the delicacies which they had enjoyed in Egypt, their flesh and fish, their leeks and onions, and expressed their doubt whether God could furnish them with such provisions as those, verse 19, 20; and, when God had done it in such profusion that it was not possible for them to consume it all, and at the same time had testified his abhorrence of their inordinate desires, they, instead of humbling themselves before him, continued impenitent, and, as my text expresses it, "for all this, they still sinned, verse 27-32."

They had not been three months in the wilderness before they even made a golden calf, and worshiped that as their deliverer. On some occasions, indeed, after signal judgments had been inflicted on them, they pretended to repent, and to turn unto God; but "their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant, verses 34-37." In truth, "they despised the pleasant land, [Psalm 106:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.24)." which God had promised to them for an inheritance; and, in the outcome, they provoked "him to swear in his wrath that they would never enter into his rest, [Psalm 95:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 95.11)."

3. They were utterly irreclaimable by any dispensations, whether of mercy or of judgment.

The mercies which God had given to them were innumerable; yet, "for all this, they still sinned." The judgments also which he inflicted were most awful; but, "for all this, they still sinned." In a word, they kept up the contest, until they all, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, were utterly consumed!

And can any parallel to this be found? Yes, indeed, it will be found in,

II. The state of the Christian Church at this day.

1. Our guilt resembles theirs.

The sins of Israel may be comprehended under these two: ingratitude and unbelief.

Let me ask: Are not these sins as prevalent among ourselves, as ever they were in the days of Israel? Are not we loaded with benefits, even as they were? What conveniences did they have, which are not showered down on us? It matters not whether our food be rained down from the clouds, or raised up from the earth; here it is, and we gather it, and have the calls of nature satisfied. The providence of God, if less visibly displayed towards us, is not a whit less careful of us; nor is his goodness towards us less manifest to the eye of faith.

But where do we find hearts duly sensible of his tender mercy?

Where do we find people rendering to him the honor due unto his name?

Where do we find people, under circumstances of trial, able to repose their confidence in God, and with peaceful resignation expecting his gracious and seasonable interposition?

Where do we find that his Word forms such a ground of trust, as to supersede all doubts and fears respecting the final outcome of events?

In a word, who among us is in the daily habit of acknowledging God in everything, and of committing everything to his disposal, and of living only to his glory? If our murmurings and discontent are less visible, they are not less real, when we cast the blame of our trials on second causes, instead of tracing them to that divine hand from whence they all proceed. And if, instead of living with Heaven in our view, and proceeding towards that as our desired rest, we are occupied mainly with the things of time and sense—we are really in the state which we have before contemplated, and may see in the Israelites of old, our own hateful deformity.

2. The gradations of our guilt, too, are the same.

They sinned. They still sinned, notwithstanding all that God could do to reclaim them. And what have we done from our youth up? In our earliest years, we no sooner began to act, than we began to violate the laws of God. As our reason became matured, it might be hoped that we should act in a way more suited to our profession, and more pleasing to God. But neither days nor years have made any difference in this respect; on the contrary, we have gone on adding iniquity to iniquity, in one continued series, even to the present hour. Nor have any dispensations of God, whether in a way of mercy or of judgment, produced any permanent effect upon our minds.

Now and then, perhaps, we may have felt a transient gleam of thankfulness on our minds, or some faint resolve to amend our ways; but both the one and the other have passed away without lasting benefit; and notwithstanding all God's efforts to reclaim us, we are still the same.

3. The aggravations of our guilt are greater far.

We have sinned against greater light than they. What did they know of the mind of God, in comparison with us? The poorest person in the midst of us, is better informed than they; and, consequently, our violations of duty are proportionably heinous in the sight of God.

We have sinned, too, against richer mercies than they. What is their redemption from Egypt, in comparison with that which has been given to us from sin and damnation? Theirs was by power only; but who can estimate the price that has been paid for us, even "the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot! [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19)."

They ate indeed of manna, and drank of water from the rock; but we have Christ himself, who is the true bread from Heaven; and we have the Holy Spirit, whom Christ pours out abundantly upon us, for the refreshing of our thirsty souls.

They had the guidance of the pillar and the cloud; but we have the Word of God, which is both "a light to our feet in general, and a lantern to our paths," for our direction and preservation, every step we take.

We have sinned, also, against stronger inducements than they. To them was promised the enjoyment of the land of Canaan, as a land flowing with milk and honey; and the loss of it was threatened as the punishment of disobedience. But Heaven and Hell are set before us; even Heaven with all its glory—and Hell with all its inconceivable terrors; the one, as the reward of our fidelity; the other, as the recompense of impenitence and unbelief.

Say, then, whether the guilt of Israel can be compared with ours? And whether, while we are ready to cast reflections on the Jews of old as a race of unparalleled impiety, we have not reason to acknowledge ourselves their equals, or rather their superiors, in iniquity!

But it is time that we descend from general views of this subject, to a personal application of it. Permit me, then, to ask of you individually,

1. What is your state at this time?

You have seen what the state of Israel was; and you know, by the state of Caleb and Joshua, what it ought to have been.

Now, has your state resembled theirs?

Are you "following the Lord fully?"

Have you searched out the Promised Land, and brought from thence the grapes of Eschol?

Are you bearing your testimony before all, that it is the duty of every man to go up and possess the land?

Are you exercising faith in God, as able to put down your enemies, and as pledged to bring you into possession of your promised inheritance?

Is there a wide difference between the unbelieving world and you, so that to the whole camp of Israel, you are patterns of courage and fidelity? [Numbers 32:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.12).

Be assured, your conduct must resemble theirs; your faith, your hope, your love, your zeal, must operate to the production of a life like theirs—if you would attain the same testimony from God, and the same happy outcome of your labors.

2. What will **your** state very shortly be?

Death is spreading its desolations far and wide; and, whether by sweeping judgments or a more silent process—is terminating the career of thousands; so that in the space of forty years a whole generation, as it were, passes away from the face of the earth!

But do all go to one place? O! could we but follow the spirits of departed men into the presence of their God, as we follow their bodies to the grave—then what scenes should we behold? In some happy cases, we should behold them seated on thrones of glory, and crowned with immortal bliss; but in how many cases would we see them hurled from the tribunal of their God into the bottomless abyss of Hell, and cast forever into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone—sad monuments of human folly, and objects of God's everlasting wrath and indignation!

Indeed, my brethren, this is no vain conceit; it is a reality; it is an event that is taking place every moment; and in the space of another day may be realized in you!

Is it not time for you to inquire, whether you have turned sincerely to God, as reconciled to you in the Son of his love; or whether you are "sinning still!"

Here the particular dispensation, whether of war, famine, pestilence, sudden death, or any other calamity—may be urged as a call from God to personal self-examination, and preparation for death!

Remember, that "the goodness and patience of God, which have been so long exercised towards you, are intended to bring you to repentance! [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4)." I beg you, do not despise these mercies, as the Israelites did in the wilderness, and as thousands around us do; but "today, while it is yet called today," bear in mind the doom that befell them—lest "you also, having the same promise of entering into God's rest, should at last come short of it! [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1)."

#634

THE FRUIT OF IMPENITENCE AND UNBELIEF

**[Psalm 78:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.32-33)**

"In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe. So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror!"

It is a saying of Solomon's, that "he who sows iniquity, shall reap vanity! [Proverbs 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.8);" and the truth of this is remarkably illustrated throughout all the history of God's ancient people. The Jews were, beyond all comparison, the most favored people upon earth; and if they had made a due improvement of their mercies, they would have been as much exalted above others in happiness, as they were in their outward privileges. But neither mercies nor judgments could prevail upon them to yield themselves sincerely to God. The mercies they received were so signal, that one would have supposed it impossible for them to forget the Donor. Their judgments, too, on some occasions were so awful, that one would have supposed fear should supply the place of love, and constrain them to turn to God with their whole hearts.

In the preceding part of this Psalm, these dealings of God with them are especially referred to; yet, in my text we are told, "In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe." In consequence of this, they reaped according to what they sowed; for, on account of this incorrigibleness, "God ended their days in futility and their years in terror!"

But is that generation passed away? Is there not among us the same obstinacy in sin? and do we not feel the same effects of transgression? Yes, truly, they are a mirror in which we may see our own image; and the events of their days are still visible in ours. This will appear, while I show,

I. The incorrigible obstinacy of sinners.

God diversifies his dealings with us for our good.

Our temporal mercies, public, social, personal—have been equal to any that have been given to any people under Heaven. But what shall I say of our spiritual mercies? Truly, if a preached Gospel is the greatest of all mercies, we have indeed very abundant reason to acknowledge the transcendent goodness of God to us.

In some instances, too, has God dealt with us, both individually and collectively, in a way of paternal chastisement.

But to an awful extent have we persisted in impenitence and unbelief.

What were the sins in which we indulged years ago? Take us as a collective body; and it must be said, "In those we continue still." The mirthful, the worldly, the sensual, the profane—all follow their respective courses as much as ever, equally unallured by mercies, and unawed by judgments. Nor have all "the wonders" of redeeming love, though so fully and faithfully proclaimed, wrought any change in us.

As the Israelites, though so visibly under the care of Almighty God, could not be prevailed upon to enter into the design of God's mercies to them, or to yield up themselves to him in a way of holy obedience—so neither are we led to exercise a simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."

Dependence on him,  
communion with him,  
 and devotedness to him  
—are as far from us as ever!

Our heads possibly may be instructed, but our hearts and lives are unchanged!

And now let me ask,

II. What are the bitter fruits which they reap from it?

Certainly, if ever a people could be happy, the circumstances in which the Israelites were placed were calculated to make them happy. But "their days were consumed in futility and their years in terror," as the just punishment of their sins. And how are our lives spent?

What have we, but vanity, futility, and trouble?

In the abundance of all things that we enjoy, it is surprising how little there is of real comfort to the possessors. Many possess all that the world can give; yet "in the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)." It may be thought that the rich are happier than the poor; but the very reverse of this is true. God has cursed their very blessings, [Deuteronomy 28:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.15-20). Yes, marriage, the nearest of all connections which God ordained for the happiness of man is, in a great majority of instances, unattended with the blessedness which the parties hoped for; yes, and too often is made a source of bitterest woe. Truly, "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards! [Job 5:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.6-7)." This poor wilderness world is found by most to be a valley of tears!

And what is this but the fruit of sin?

This was not the state of man in Paradise; it came as the fruit of sin; and in proportion as men live without God in the world, is the world and everything in it embittered to them.

It may be asked: Are the saints exempt from this common lot? Do not they find "vanity and trouble" here below, as well as others? They do; but by no means in the same degree. To the saints, blessings are really blessings; and even troubles are blessings in disguise! The man who truly believes in Christ, enjoys, in common mercies, a sense of God's love and favor, to which an unbeliever is an utter stranger; and his trials he receives as paternal chastisements, which are the means ordained for his furtherance in the divine life, and for the eventual increase of his happiness to all eternity. Though therefore, in a certain degree, he finds vanity and vexation of spirit to be stamped on all sublunary good, he has, on the whole, a different portion from that of the ungodly world even here; and hereafter, I need not say how widely different is his lot.

As for the impenitent and unbelieving, possess what they may, they are not happy; and, in the prospect of death and judgment, it is from lack of reflection only if they are not completely miserable.

To APPLY the subject to our hearts.

Have we not sinned enough already? May not the past time suffice for our neglect of God, and our contempt of his favors? Shall it continue to be said of us, 'They have still sinned; and will not believe in God, notwithstanding all his wondrous works?' Do but look back, and see what has hitherto been the "fruit" of such a life, [Romans 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.21).

I appeal to all: What have you found but vanity and trouble, even in your best enjoyments? Truly, they have been but as the "crackling of thorns under a pot," which blazed for a moment, and then vanished in smoke! [Ecclesiastes 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.6). Indeed, brethren, if the happiness of this world only, were concerned, I would recommend to you a life of penitential sorrow, and of entire devotedness to God; for "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come, [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8)." But there is a world to come; a world in which we shall reap, in its full extent, the fruit of our present conduct.

Oh! where will the impenitent transgressor find pardon then? Where the contemptuous unbelieving sinner then flee to hide himself from the wrath of an avenging God? Let there then, brethren, be an end to your contest with the God of Heaven. Cast down the weapons of your rebellion; and, with penitential faith, cast yourselves on the Savior, who died even for the very chief of sinners. "Humble yourselves truly under the mighty hand of God; and in due season, notwithstanding all your past transgressions, he will lift you up! [James 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.10)."

#635

THE EXTENT OF GOD'S MERCY

**[Psalm 78:34-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-39)**

"Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again. They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return."

The Psalm before us is altogether historical; yet may it be called one great parable. It is, in fact, so called by the Psalmist himself; and the very words by which he designates this composition are quoted by the Evangelist as fulfilled, when our blessed Lord spoke to the people in parables, and in parables exclusively. Compare verse 2 with [Matthew 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.35).

The truth is, that the whole account of the redemption of Israel from Egypt, with their preservation in the wilderness, and their final establishment in the land of Canaan, is typical of man's redemption through Christ, and of the final salvation of all God's chosen people. It is not unlike the parable of the Prodigal Son; and, unless we view it in this light, and read in it the great concerns of our own souls, we have no just conception of its true import.

As a record of the most important events in the Jewish history, the writer of it might justly urge the importance of transmitting it with care, and teaching it with diligence, to all succeeding generations, verses 3-6; but, as a vehicle of spiritual instruction, it is of inestimable value, not to Jews only, but to Gentiles also, and ought to be studied with care by every man.

We shall not now enter into a minute illustration of this truth, because it would occupy far more of your attention than could be allotted to one—but a general view of the subject will be brought before us, while we notice the conduct of the Israelites towards God, and his forbearance towards them, or, in other words:

I. The extent of the wickedness of the Israelites.

They were continually provoking God to anger.

They were from the beginning "a rebellious and obstinate people." Never would they pay any regard to God, until they were constrained to do so by his chastening rod. In vain were his mercies multiplied unto them; they overlooked them all, and "forgot all the wonders" of his love and mercy, verse 11. Dissatisfied with what he gave them for their subsistence, notwithstanding it was "angels' food," they lusted after things which were in no respect necessary for their well-being, verse 18-25. And when they had provoked God to punish them for their ungrateful murmurings, instead of being reclaimed by his chastisements, "they only sinned yet more against him! verse 17, 32." When, in consequence of their obstinacy, these chastisements became more severe, and no way of deliverance was found but by their turning unto God, they pretended to return unto him; but it was a mere pretense. They called to remembrance his past interpositions in their favor, and professed to acknowledge him as their Redeemer and their God; but they only "flattered him" with titles, which excited no corresponding opinions in their hearts, and "lied unto him" with vows, which they never intended to perform. They pretended to lay hold on "his covenant;" but they would "not be steadfast in it, or perform any of the engagements which it entailed upon them."

And what is this, but a history of **ourselves** also?

In our prosperity, we care nothing about God, "he is not in all our thoughts." But under some heavy calamity we begin to lay to heart our former transgressions, and to inquire after God. This is common, especially in sickness, and at the expected approach of death, [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.16) and [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15). Then we can bear to hear of God, and of Christ; yes, we apply to God as our Father, and to Christ as our Redeemer; we acknowledge with apparent gratitude all that they have done for us; and profess a dependence on them for all that we stand in need of.

Yet in the midst of all these professions there is no true contrition, no real self-abhorrence, no fixed determination to give up ourselves unreservedly to God. We approach our God indeed, but it is "with flattery and lies! [Hosea 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.12)." We profess much love to him, and much delight in that covenant which he has made with us in Christ Jesus; but "our hearts are not right with him, neither are we steadfast in his covenant." This appears from our speedy return to worldliness and vanity, as soon as ever the judgment is removed from us. We are like metal taken out of the furnace, which, however liquefied, soon returns to its original hardness. Our relentings possibly have been renewed either under the ministry of the Word, or by some fresh calamity; but, after all, like Pharaoh, we have only verified that humiliating description of the Apostle, "we have returned again with the dog to his vomit; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

These rebellions however against their God only gave occasion for displaying:

II. The extent of his mercy.

Many times did he forgive them.

Often, through the greatness of their provocations, did he lift up his hand to destroy them in the wilderness; but he forbore to execute upon them the judgments they deserved. "He remembered that they were but flesh, or as a wind that passes away, and comes not again;" and, if he should give vent to his indignation against them, they must inevitably, and irremediably perish!

In the same way, he has dealt with us.

"How oft have we provoked him, and grieved him by our transgressions! verse 40." Yet on every fresh occasion he has shown himself "slow to anger and of great kindness." Let every one think with himself how many seasons there have been, when, in heart at least, if not in act—we have exceeded our usual measure of wickedness, and when he might have cut us off, so to speak, with advantage, and made us signal monuments of his displeasure. Yet he has borne with us, and not allowed his whole displeasure to arise. He has, thus far at least, "forgiven us;" and, in answer to the intercessions of our great High Priest, he has spared the barren fig-tree, revoking the order for its removal, and renewing, for its preservation, all the means which have hitherto been used in vain.

Of God's mercy we are all living monuments; from time to time he has said concerning us, "How shall I give you up? [Hosea 11:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.7-9)." "Will you not be made clean? when shall it once be? [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.27)." Yes, we must all bear witness for him, that the only reason of our not having been long since "consumed, is because his compassions never fail."

See, then:

1. What improvement we should make of afflictive providences.

What the Jews professed to do, we should do in reality. God sends afflictions for this end; and, if they produce this blessed effect, we shall have reason to be thankful for them.

2. What, under all circumstances, should be the chief object of our attention.

The Jews failed, because "their heart was not right with God." Let us look to this, that we indulge not hypocrisy in our hearts. If we call God our God, and our Redeemer—then let our eyes be to him as our only, and our all-sufficient Help!

#636

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

**[Psalm 80:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 80.17-19)**

"Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved."

This Psalm appears to have been written about the time when Sennacherib had invaded the land of Judah, and threatened the two remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin with the same utter destruction as had already been inflicted on the ten tribes or Israel. The writer of this Psalm, whoever he was, addresses Jehovah in nearly the same terms as Hezekiah did on that occasion, even as "the Lord Almighty that dwelt between the cherubim, verse 1 with [Isaiah 37:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.15-17)." And when he says, "Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up your strength, and come and save us;" he merely desires that God would afford them now the same protection as he had formerly afforded to all his people in the wilderness; which protection these three tribes had better opportunities of discovering than others; because, while three tribes preceded the ark, and three marched on either side, these three brought up the rear, and consequently were in a better situation for noticing the various interpositions of Jehovah in their behalf.

The disconsolate state of the country at that time is set forth by the Psalmist under the figure of a vine, which had been planted there by Jehovah himself, and had flourished so as to fill the whole land; but now it was exposed to all the rage of the enemy, who "wasted and destroyed it;" and it would shortly be entirely rooted out, if God did not speedily interpose for its protection, verses 8-16.

By "the man of God's right hand, and the Son of Man whom God had made strong for himself," I suppose the Psalmist intended to specify king Hezekiah, whom he entreated God to make his instrument for effecting the desired deliverance; and in the latter verses of my text he promises, in behalf of the nation at large, that the mercy shall not be lost upon them—but shall be requited by them in the way which God will approve, even by greater steadfastness in their future adherence to him, and a more entire obedience to his commands.

In this view, I conceive, the Psalm may properly be applied either to the Church, or to any individual believer in a season of deep distress; and "the Son of Man, whom Jehovah has made strong for himself," may be understood as designating the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King of Israel, and whom in that capacity Hezekiah especially prefigured.

Let the afflicted believer then see in this passage:

I. How to approach God in a season of trouble.

We are especially invited to "go to God in a time of trouble." But in what way shall we approach him?

The Lord Jesus Christ is the appointed Head of God's Church and people. Even while he was yet on earth, "all power in Heaven and on earth was given to him, [Matthew 27:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.18);" and, on his ascension to Heaven, he was constituted "Head over all things to the Church, [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22)," and had all fullness committed to him, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19), "that he might fill all things, [Ephesians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.10)," and be the one source of light and life to the spiritual world, as the sun in the firmament is to this material globe on which we live.

To this the Psalmist bears testimony, when he says, "You spoke in vision to your Holy One, and said, I have laid help upon One that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him; with whom my hand shall be established; my arm also shall strengthen him [Psalm 89:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19-21)."

In this passage there is no doubt but that the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of precisely in the view in which I suppose him to be spoken of in the Psalm before us. He is that David whom God has anointed to rule over his Church and people, and through whom he will show himself at all times mighty to save.

Through Jesus, then, we must seek for God's effectual help.

Through him must we look for the acceptance of our prayers; and from him must we expect those communications which God has promised to his believing people. "God has made him strong"—not for us only, but "for himself" also; seeing that in this mode of dispensing his blessings he is particularly glorified.

This is the account given us by an inspired Apostle, "Him has God highly exalted, and given him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father! [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11)."

And to the same effect our Lord himself also says, "Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do—that the Father may be glorified in the Son, [John 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13)." Do not let anyone, then, hesitate to look thus to Christ, from an apprehension that, in so honoring the Son, he should dishonor the Father; for God would have "all men to honor the Son even as they honor the Father;" and he declares, that "he who honors not the Son, honors not the Father who has sent him, [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23)." Be it remembered, then, that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life; and that no man comes unto the Father, but by him! [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)."

From the passage before us we may further learn,

II. What we should seek for at His hands.

Doubtless we are permitted to ask for deliverance from trouble. But there are other things which we are far more concerned to ask, even things for the production of which affliction itself is sent us.

1. We should seek the communications of God's grace.

These are of infinitely more importance than any temporal deliverance. With these, every affliction is light; without them, no enjoyment whatever is of any real value. Whatever is our state as it respects ease or trouble—we are dead, and need to be "quickened;" we are rebellious, and need to be "turned."

The first thing, then, that we should seek, should be quickening and converting grace. Every creature in the universe stands in need of these; and on the attainment of it depends our everlasting welfare. Let everyone, then, pray, "Quicken me, O Lord!" Oh! turn me, for your mercy's sake! "Turn me, and I shall be turned!"

2. We should seek the manifestations of God's favor in our lives.

We should never rest without an evidence in our own souls that we are the Lord's. While our saving interest in his favor is doubtful, what happiness can we enjoy? There must always be a secret fear and misgiving, that before long we may become monuments of his righteous indignation. We should therefore entreat of God to "lift up the light of his countenance upon us," and to give us a spirit of adoption, testifying that we are his.

It is not the sun of outward prosperity that we are to desire, but that inward light, by which we can discern our adoption into his family, and our title to his glory! This will make every "yoke easy, and every burden light."

But the text itself leads us to consider:

III. The fruit and consequence of accepted prayer.

1. These blessings once obtained, we shall assuredly possess **stability in God's ways**.

Thousands there are who "run well only for a season," and who, by turning back from God, make "their latter end worse than their beginning." But real conversion, especially when it issues in a peaceful walk with God, produces a decision of character which nothing can shake. I do not mean to say that any man has strength of his own, whereby he can stand; even Paul himself needed incessant care and watchfulness, lest, "after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away." But a sense of God's love in the soul confirms our confidence in him; and enables us, in dependence on his grace, to hurl defiance at all the enemies of our salvation, and to rest assured that "none shall ever prevail to separate us from his love!"

2. These blessings once obtained, we shall assuredly possess **the everlasting enjoyment of his favor**.

Thrice is this repeated, and each time with increasing earnestness, "Turn us again, O God, and we shall be saved; turn again, O God Almighty, and we shall be saved; turn us again, O Lord God Almighty, and we shall be saved, verses 80:7, 19." If we commit ourselves truly to the Lord Jesus Christ, then "none shall ever pluck us out of his hands;" but that promise shall be fully verified, "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end! [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

Hence we may see:

1. How little reason there is for any man to despond.

Who can be in a more desperate state than that depicted in the Psalm before us? Yet for them was relief solicited and obtained.

And is there not the same help for us? Is not the Savior as mighty as ever? Is his hand shortened at all, that it cannot save? or his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Let, then, the same means be used, and the same result may assuredly be expected.

I will suppose that the enemy has "overflowed even to the neck," and is even now exulting in his triumphs. Spread but your case before the Lord, as Hezekiah did, and you may adopt the language which was put into his mouth, "The virgin, the daughter of Israel, has despised you, and laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you, [Isaiah 37:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.22)." Sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one believing and praying and believing soul be left to perish eternally.

2. How little ground there is for anyone to boast.

I will suppose that one of you is now flourishing like the vine, of which the Psalmist speaks, in all its glory. How did you get here? Know that you were once in Egypt, and were brought out thence to the place in which you stand. And who has kept you from being trodden down and devoured by the beasts of the field?

It is God alone who has kept you, even to the present hour. It is He who gave you his converting grace; He who infused peace into your soul by the light of his reconciled countenance. And when you shall arrive at the realms of glory, it is to Him that you must ascribe your salvation, from first to last.

If any man be disposed to boast, I would ask, "Who made you to differ? And what do you have, which you have not received?" While you are building on the true foundation here, you must say continually, "By the grace of God, I am what I am! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10);" and when "the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings," you must spend eternity in crying, "Grace, grace unto it! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)."

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PRAYER EFFECTUAL, TO ANY EXTENT

**[Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)**

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."

Access to God, and a certainty of acceptance with him, have been among the most distinguished privileges of the Lord's people in all ages.

To his ancient people the Jews, God said, "What nation is there so great, who has God so near unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?"

To us, under the Christian dispensation, it is promised, that "wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, there will that blessed Savior be in the midst of them." None shall "draw near to him in prayer, but he will also draw near to them," to answer their prayers.

In the Psalm before us, God most affectionately encourages his people to come to him, and to enlarge their requests to the utmost extent of their necessities, "Hear, O my people! and I will testify unto you, O Israel, if you will hearken unto me." "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."

Here, brethren, let me call your attention to,

I. The invitation given to us.

How comprehensive the words in which this invitation is contained!

Here is no limit to our petitions. On the contrary, we are encouraged to extend them to everything that our souls can desire. Nor is there any limit assigned, beyond which we are not to expect an answer. Whatever we need for body or for soul, for time or for eternity—it shall all be given to us, if only we will "approach unto God," and "make our requests known unto him."

And how marvelous is the invitation, as sent by God to sinful man!

God can receive nothing from us, "our goodness can never extend to him." He is altogether independent of us; and if the whole human race were annihilated this very moment, God would suffer no loss. Neither his honor nor his happiness were in the least diminished, when the fallen angels were cast out of Heaven into the bottomless abyss of Hell; nor if we were all plunged into the same abyss of misery, would God be in the least affected by it. Yet, behold, He deigns to send us the gracious invitation which we have just heard, and permits even the vilest among us to regard it as addressed personally to himself. To every soul among us he says, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it!"

Listen then with wonder to,

II. The consideration with which it is enforced.

Surprising encouragement! Mark it,

1. As referring to God's ancient people **the Jews**.

God had brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm. What an evidence was this of his power! and what a pledge was this of his willingness to do for them all that their necessities might require!

Behold the sea opening before them, to give a dry path to them, and to overwhelm in one common ruin every one of their Egyptian pursuers!

Behold the bread given them for forty years by a daily miraculous supply from Heaven, and the water from the rock following them in all their way!

See them at last established in the Promised Land! Could they ask more than had already been done for them?

And if these things had been done notwithstanding all their rebellions, what should they not obtain if they would implore it with all humility from God?

2. As comprehending that more wonderful redemption given to **us**.

If the typical redemption from Egypt afforded such encouragement to prayer—then what must we think of that redemption which it shadowed forth, even the redemption of our souls from death and Hell, by the precious blood of God's only dear Son? Hear Jehovah saying, 'I am the Lord your God, who became a man for you; who died upon the cross for you; who bore your sins in my own body on the tree, that you might be freed from the condemnation due to them, and might inherit a throne of glory!'

What a claim is this to our gratitude! what an incentive to the utmost possible enlargement of our petitions! And what an encouragement to our most unshaken trust!

Take the invitation by itself, and it expresses all that we can wish; but take it in connection with this consideration with which it is enforced, and methinks there will not be one among us that will not most cordially accept it, and most thankfully avail himself of the liberty, the inestimable liberty, thus accorded to him.

But, seeing that this invitation has been so often sent to us:

1. How amazing is it that any of us can live without prayer!

Methinks it were almost a libel upon human nature to suppose that there should be anyone so stupid and so brutish as to live without prayer; and I ought to make an apology for suggesting even a possibility that such a one may be found in this assembly. Well, forgive me, if in this I have erred; yet I would affectionately put it home to the consciences of all who are here present, and ask: Have you, my brethren, and you, and you, really sought after God, and spread your needs before him, and implored mercy at his hands, and wrestled with him, as it were, in prayer, for an outpouring of his Spirit upon you?

Have you done it this past week?

Have you done it this very morning?

Can you call God to witness that you have thus opened your mouth wide before him, in the hope that he would fill and satisfy you with the abundance of his grace?

Is there no one among you that stands reproved for his neglect of this duty? Yes, rather, are there not some among you who have never poured out their souls before God in prayer during their whole life, or, at all events, only under the pressure of some great calamity, which, when it was past, left them in the same careless and obdurate state as before?

Perhaps some of you may have repeated some form of prayer which you learned in early life, or may have read some prayer out of a book; but this is not prayer, if it is unattended with the real desires of the heart; prayer is not a mere service of the lip and knee, but the effusion of the soul before God in earnest supplication.

I lament to think how many there are utter strangers to such holy wrestlings, such sweet communion with their God. Let me, then, remind such people what sad regret they excite in the bosom of Jehovah; and what bitter regret they themselves also will one day experience in their own bosoms. God says, "O that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" And will not you also, before long, adopt a similar language, and say, "O that I had hearkened to the voice of God, and had walked in the ways to which he called me!" And if God contemplates with such regret the blessings which he would have bestowed, verse 13-16, with what sad regret will you one day view the blessings you have lost! Be wise in time; and now avail yourselves of the opportunity that is afforded you, "seeking the Lord while he may be found, and calling upon him while he is near."

2. How lamentable is it that anyone should yield to discouragement in prayer!

What could God say to you, more than he has said; or do for you, more than he has done? Paul says, "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" Only reflect on what he has done, and how possible it is that any fallen creature should dare to ask such things at God's hands, and you need not fear to enlarge your petitions, to the utmost extent of language to express, or of imagination to conceive. You are not straitened in him; be not straitened in yourselves, [2 Corinthians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.12). Only spread your needs before him freely, and you shall find that "He is able to do for you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or even think! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)." Go to him, then, and "pray to him with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit;" yes, "pray without ceasing," and "give him no rest" until he has answered your requests. Do not be hasty to imagine that he will not hear; because he may already have heard and answered in the way most conducive to your good, while you are doubting whether he will so much as listen to your petitions. Of course you cannot expect to receive, unless you ask according to his will, [1 John 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.14); but, with that reserve alone, I assure you, that "you may ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7)." Only "ask in faith," and "according to your faith it shall be done unto you."

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GOD GIVING UP OBSTINATE TRANSGRESSORS

**[Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12)**

"But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices."

The history of the Jews is not a mere record of times and people far distant from us, but a display of the Divine procedure towards others, as a pledge of a similar procedure towards us. The Jews were intended as examples to the Church of God in all ages: their prosperity while serving God, and their adversity when they had departed from him, were designed to show us what blessings we may expect at God's hands, if we serve him acceptably; and what judgments we may expect at God's hands, if we rebel against him. See [1 Corinthians 10:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-11) and [Hebrews 3:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.16-19); [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1). In this view it will be profitable to consider the words before us:

I. The perverseness complained of.

Nothing could exceed the kindness of God towards his people of old.

How tender and affectionate is his address to them, verse 8; He entreats them not to look to any strange god, since he alone has an exclusive right to their regard, verses 9, 10. He assures them also, that whatever they shall ask at his hands, he will do it for them, verse 10 with [Deuteronomy 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.7).

And is it not precisely in the same way that he addresses us? He invites us:  
to look to him, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22); [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3),  
and to come unto him, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28),  
and to ask of him whatever we will, with an assurance that we shall not be disappointed of our hope, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14); [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7).

There is no limitation or exception, provided only the things we desire are agreeable to his holy will. If we plead with him in earnest—then there is:  
no sin that shall not be forgiven, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18),  
no corruption that shall not be mortified, [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19),  
no need that shall not be supplied, [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19).

He engages, that, to whatever temptation we may be exposed, his grace shall be sufficient for us! [2 Corinthians 12:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-9).

But their obstinacy was incorrigible.

The Jews, with but few exceptions, "would not hearken to his voice." His precepts, his promises, his threatenings, were alike disregarded by them! They would have nothing to do with him, but said to his messengers whom he sent to reclaim them, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us!"

And is it not thus with us? Is not his authority trampled on by us? Are not both his mercies and judgments almost universally despised? We will have other objects of our affections in preference to him. We will not open our mouths in prayer, though we know that nothing is to be obtained without it. The language of our hearts and actions is, "We will not have this man to reign over us! [Luke 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.14)." Notwithstanding all that he has done to redeem us from death and Hell, we will not take upon ourselves his light and easy yoke.

While we thus imitate the perverseness of the Jews, let us tremble for fear of:

II. The judgments God inflicted on account of their perverseness .

Consider:

1. What a **loss** they sustained.

He would have preserved them in Canaan, and loaded them with all imaginable blessings, even as he had done in former times, [Deuteronomy 32:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.29).

But this was a very faint shadow of what he would do for us. What victory would he have given us over all our spiritual enemies! What a fullness of consolation and joy also would he have bestowed upon us, in the communications of his grace, and the manifestations of his love! Surely his Spirit, as "a Spirit of adoption," would have "witnessed with our spirits that we were his," and would have "sealed us unto the day of redemption".

2. What **misery** they incurred.

God gave them up to idolatry, and to their own hearts' lusts; and left them to "walk in their own counsels. See [Romans 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.24); [Romans 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.26); [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28). "So I gave them up!"

And this is the curse which he denounces against us also. "His Spirit will not always strive with us." If he sees that we are bent upon our evil ways, he will abandon us to our own delusions! [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12), and will say, "He is joined to idols, let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)." A greater curse than this God cannot inflict, because our remaining days will be occupied only in augmenting our guilt and worsening our condemnation! [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5). To give us over to the uncontrolled influence of self, is a certain prelude to our everlasting damnation! It is, in fact, the very beginning of Hell, where it will be said to the unhappy souls, "He who is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he who is unjust, let him be unjust still! [Revelation 22:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.11)."

Hence it appears,

1. Whose fault it will be, if any be lost.

None can lay it to the charge of God that he is unwilling to save them. He has sworn with an oath that he wills not the death of any sinner, [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11). [1 Timothy 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.4). And in the Psalm before us he takes up a lamentation over those who obstinately compel him to give them up, verse 13. Thus did our blessed Lord weep over the murderous Jerusalem, [Luke 19:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.40-41); and thus does he bemoan over all impenitent transgressors, "You will not come unto me that you may have life [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40)." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you—how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! [Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37)."

And what a bitter source of self-condemnation will this be to us, that God would have saved us, but we would not be saved by him! The language which God now uses over us, we shall then use in reference to ourselves, "O that I had hearkened to his voice! O that I had walked in his ways!" How should I have been at this instant triumphing over my cruel adversary, and feasting on all the richest fruits of paradise, instead of dwelling with everlasting burnings, without one drop of water to cool my tongue! Surely this reflection will be the bitterest ingredient in that bitter cup, which those who perish will be drinking of to all eternity!

2. Whose will be the glory, if any are saved.

We never come to Christ, until the Father, by the mighty working of his power, draws us to him. Such is the pride of the human heart, that no man will submit to be saved by grace alone, until God has made him "willing in the day of his power." If therefore we have been brought to hearken to his voice, let us remember Who it is that has unstopped our ears.

If it is said, We prayed for these blessings; and therefore we at least may glory that the blessings do not come to us unsolicited; we would ask, Who inclined or enabled us to pray? We should never have been inclined to pray, if God had not given us a spirit of grace and of supplication, "nor should we have known what to pray for as we ought, if He by his Spirit had not helped our infirmities."

If it is still said, "Yet we prayed." Be it so; but how long were you before you prayed at all? And what have been your prayers since ever you began to pray? Are you not amazed when you review your prayers, and see how cold, and dead, and formal they have been?

What if a beggar had asked of you in the way that you have but too often asked of God? Would you have granted his request? Or, if you had granted his request, and not only relieved his present necessities, but conferred upon him one half of your fortune, would you not be surprised, if he, instead of admiring your unequaled generosity, were taking credit to himself for asking relief from you? Know then, that if you are partaking of God's mercy, you are no other than "beggars, who have been taken from the dunghill, and set among the princes!" Know that you are altogether debtors to the sovereign grace of God, and must ascribe to him "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever."

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DIVINE ORDINANCES LOVELY

**[Psalm 84:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.1-4)**

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Selah"

Truly it is sweet to read of the experience of the former saints, and to be able to appeal to it in vindication of our own experience. I do not wonder that the world should cry out against the people of the Lord as enthusiastic and absurd; for they cannot by any means conceive how a person should lose all relish for carnal delights, and find all his happiness in employments wherein they see nothing but restraint and melancholy. But, indeed, there is a delight in communion with a reconciled God, an ineffable "joy, with which the stranger intermeddles not." This is well expressed in the passage before us; from whence I shall take occasion to show,

I. The light in which we should view divine ordinances.

Certainly the expressions here used in reference to them are exceedingly strong. To a mind not conversant with the subject, they would appear rather like the flights of a poetical imagination than as the dictates of sober judgment. But they are not a whit too strong, if viewed in reference to the object respecting which they treat. Both body and soul may well unite in the feelings here expressed, feelings of intense desire, such as envies the very birds the privilege they enjoy of building their nests around the sacred edifice where God's presence is enjoyed. Truly the tabernacles of the Most High will appear amiable, if we consider that in them,

1. God's presence is given.

Formerly God dwelt in his sanctuary by the Shechinah, a bright cloud, the symbol of his presence, which was in itself visible to the eye of sense, though it was seen only by the High Priest, and that only on one day in the year. Now, his presence is visible only to the eye of faith (for there is an eye that "sees Him who is invisible, [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27)."), and by him who possesses a spiritual discernment, even though he be the least and lowest of God's children, the divine presence is both seen and felt. What else is the meaning of those words, "If any man loves me, my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him?"

Yes, truly, God will manifest himself to his believing people as he does not unto the world, [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23);" he will, in an especial manner, "draw near to those who draw near to him. "Wherever two or three are met together in his name, he will be in the midst of them;" and to every weeping suppliant he will say, "Behold me, behold me! [Isaiah 65:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.1)." "Here I am! [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9)."

2. His blessings are dispensed.

In the days of our blessed Lord, we are informed, that multitudes, laboring under every kind of malady, thronged about him; and that "virtue went forth from him to heal them all, [Luke 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.19)."

Somewhat similar to this may yet be seen under the ministration of the Gospel. Multitudes, oppressed with every species of mental trouble, approach the Majesty of Heaven, to pour out before him their supplications, and to receive from him a supply for their diversified necessities. The weary and heavy-laden sinner sues for pardon and peace; the soul, harassed with temptations, implores strength whereby to cope with its great Adversary, and to fulfill the will of God; in a word, whatever men's trials may be, there they bring them all; and there they look for aid; and there, through the ministry of the Word, they actually "find mercy and grace to help them in the time of need."

To every distinct case God mercifully suits his aid; and the support afforded by him proves sufficient for them all; so that, as thousands can testify, when they have come hungering and thirsting for the blessings of salvation, they have not been sent away empty, but have been filled and satisfied with the plenteousness of God's house, and had their sorrows turned into joy.

3. His name is glorified.

Every one, entering the house of God in a befitting spirit, feels a consciousness that he is approaching a Father and a Friend; yes, a Friend who is infinitely more willing to give than the most oppressed suppliants can be to ask, and "willing to give exceedingly above all that they can either ask or think." Conceive of millions assembled at the very same instant of time, in every quarter of the globe, thus honoring their God as omnipresent to hear their prayers, and omnipotent to supply their needs. Who must not love those ordinances where God is so exalted? Again, amidst all the millions that have been relieved, there is but one sentiment of gratitude to God as their Almighty and all-gracious Benefactor.

Truly, in this respect the tabernacles of the Most High on earth resemble his house above, where all the hosts, whether of saints or angels, join in one harmonious song of praise to their creating and redeeming God. Say, are not "God's tabernacles amiable" in such a view as this? and can anyone long for them with too intense desire, or enter them with too sublime delight?

But that this may be more manifest, let us consider,

II. The blessedness of those who estimate them aright.

As for those who only occasionally visit the house of God, merely for form sake or to perform a duty, it cannot be expected that they should derive much benefit to their souls. But those who, in the habit of their minds, "dwell," as it were, "in God's courts," will find their souls exceedingly elated and comforted. They will acquire, yes, and speedily too attain, a disposition of mind that is little understood by the world at large, a spirit of praise and thanksgiving, not unlike to that which animates the hosts above.

1. Their occasions for praise will incessantly be renewed.

Not a prayer they offer shall ever go forth in vain. Their access to God will become more intimate, their confidence in him more entire, their communion with him more sweet, and their communications from him more abundant. As every day brings with it fresh temporal benefits, so will their stock of spiritual blessings be daily multiplied, so that it shall appear to them as if a new series of mercies were every day begun; a series, for the acknowledgment of which an eternity of ages would scarcely suffice.

2. In the exercise of praise they will abound more and more.

I do not say that they will cease to pray; for their need of prayer will never cease, until they arrive in Heaven itself. But their devotions will more assume the character of praise; their view of the divine perfections will be greatly enlarged; and their sense of God's mercies be deepened, insomuch that they will see mercy in everything, and be disposed "in everything to give thanks."

Their very trials and afflictions will be regarded as tokens of God's love, and as incentives to praise Him "who gives songs in the night." If their tribulations are great, they will glory in them, as contributing both to their present, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28), and eternal welfare, [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18).

Behold the Apostles just dismissed from scourging and imprisonment! they go forth "rejoicing that they are counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake." Behold Paul and Silas also with their feet made fast in the stocks, while their backs are yet bleeding by the stripes just recently inflicted on them! Do they mourn and weep? No, "they sing praises unto God at midnight."

Now, all this was the fruit of communion with God; and in proportion as we also live near to God in prayer, we shall surely find, whether in life or death, little else than occasions of praise. In whatever state we are, we shall be uttering thanksgivings to God; yes, come what may, we shall "be still praising him."

SEE, then, I beg you,

1. The happiness of the saints.

I may appeal to you, whether the worldling has any source of joy that can be compared with this? No, truly; the highst monarch upon earth that is ignorant of God, feeds only upon husks; whereas the true saint, though as poor as Lazarus himself, eats of "angels' food".

2. The blessedness of Heaven.

If such be God's courts below, what must Heaven itself be? Well may we long to be there. Well may we "desire to depart and be with Christ," where we shall "behold him face to face." I need not say how blessed is that choir who day and night incessantly sing praises to God and to the Lamb. But may we so anticipate that employment, that we may be prepared to join in it to all eternity! Amen, and Amen.

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GOD'S ORDINANCES PRECIOUS

**[Psalm 84:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10)**

"I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

In matters of doubtful disputation, it is of great advantage to have some established ground to which reference may be made; and some adjudged case, on which arguments may be founded, without any farther appeal.

In my text, the point at issue is: Which is preferable, the service of God—or the service of the world? On this subject there is a great diversity of opinion; some accounting the world the only true source of happiness, while others conceive that there is no happiness but in God. But we have in the very words before the text an adjudged case, which may well determine the point forever. The Psalmist expressly declares, that "a day in God's courts is better than a thousand" elsewhere. If a doubt arises whether he was competent to decide the matter, I answer, that, as a King, he knew all that attached to royalty and to the splendor of earthly courts; and, as a saint, he knew what was to be found in the exercises of piety and devotion; and, consequently, he was a proper person to hold the scales, and to declare on which side true happiness prevailed.

Besides, his particular situation at this time qualified him in a more than ordinary way to form a just judgment; for he was driven (it is supposed) by Absalom both from his throne and from the house of God; and consequently he could declare, from his own experience, which of the two losses was the heavier, and which was the greater subject of regret. Under these circumstances we read not one word of complaint respecting the loss of his kingdom; his mind was wholly occupied about the ordinances of God, of which he was deprived. "How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord Almighty! My soul longs, yes, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God! verse 1, 2." He envies the very birds the facility which they enjoyed of approaching the altars of the Lord, and more especially the priests who had constant opportunities of officiating there; as also the people, who could come, though with great difficulty, from the extreme parts of the land to worship there at the appointed feasts, verse 3-7. He then begs of God to restore him to the enjoyment of these lost privileges, verse 8, 9; and declares, that, in his judgment, "one day spent in his courts was better than a thousand" elsewhere; and that he would rather be a door-keeper in the House of God, than to dwell amidst the richest enjoyments that the tents of wickedness could afford him.

The case being so clearly determined by him, I will endeavor to point out

I. The grounds of David's judgment.

He preferred the lowest office imaginable in the House of the Lord, before the highest that was merely secular; for he deemed it:

1. More honorable.

In earthly palaces, dwell "men of like passions with ourselves;" but in Mount Zion God himself dwells; there he holds his court; there he sits upon his throne; there all his servants come to behold his glory, to worship at his footstool, and to receive the tokens of his gracious favor. There, though invisible, are assembled all the hosts of Heaven; so that the humble worshiper, when coming there, is justly said to have "come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, [Hebrews 12:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22-24)."

Now, conceive of a poor man admitted only to "the threshold" of this holy place, and compare his state with that of the most distinguished favorite of an earthly monarch; and say, whether the honor conferred on him be not infinitely higher than any which earthly courtiers can possess? In truth, the matter admits not of comparison. Between a king on his throne and a beggar on the dunghill there is no disparity at all—when compared with that between a creature and his Creator; so that in this respect the Psalmist had just ground for his preference; for in proportion as "God humbles himself, when he beholds the things which are on earth," is that man exalted, who becomes the object of his condescension and grace.

2. More delightful.

We will concede to the delights of sense all that the most optimistic mind can annex to them; but still they are carnal and temporary, and cloying and unsatisfying; and the man who possesses the greatest portion of them all, must acknowledge them to be justly designated, "Vanity and vexation of spirit."

But very different is the character of those pleasures which the sinner partakes of in the presence of his God. Behold the publican standing, as it were, on the very threshold of God's house, as unworthy to enter in; behold him smiting his bosom, and, with floods of tears, crying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" To the eye of sense he appears a miserable object that decides at once the point at issue in favor of the world; but to the eye of faith he is an object whose state may well be envied by the greatest and happiest of carnal men; for He, who is "the true and faithful Witness," has said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn." On the mind of such a penitent the light of truth beams with increasing splendor; the peace of God flows down into his soul; a hope full of immortality springs up within him; and the joy of the Holy Spirit elevates his mind to Heaven, and gives him a foretaste of angelic bliss. Follow this same person through all the services of the sanctuary; behold him pouring out his soul in prayer to God; hear him singing the praises of redeeming love; mark the emotions of his soul when God's Word is preached, and the blessings of redemption, as purchased by Christ and secured to him by an everlasting covenant, are unfolded to his view. What are any carnal delights in comparison with those which fill his soul? Truly, they are not worth a thought; they are only as the husks of swine, while he is feasting on "angels' food."

3. More profitable.

A man may gain temporal advancement by attending on earthly courts; but how many miss their aim! And, after all, what does the most successful gain? What can he possess, more than food and clothing? Let the most favored courtier in the universe say, whether that which he has so assiduously followed be not a delusive shadow, an unsubstantial vanity?

But the humble worshiper is in no danger of disappointment; and every particle of what he gains is "durable riches." What can be put in competition with "a new heart," "a right spirit," "a divine nature," a transformation of soul into the very image of God, a fitness for Heaven, and a title to an everlasting inheritance? Yet these are the certain portion of those who wait on God in his appointed ordinances; not one can fail, if only he seeks these things in the way that God has ordained, namely, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by an entire surrender of the soul to him. Take notice, I do not speak here of those who may be supposed to occupy the highest seats in the Lord's house, as prophets and Apostles; I speak of "the door-keeper, the man upon the threshold," whose conscious unworthiness allows him "not so much as to lift up his eyes" to his Redeemer's throne; it is of him I say, that he has a better portion than the whole world can bestow; and that "happy is the man that is in such a case; yes, happy is the man who has the Lord for his God!"

Having given what I conceive to be ample grounds for David's judgment, I now come to mark,

II. The wisdom of David's decision.

Certainly the whole world of the ungodly are at dispute with him on this point. They have no taste for spiritual exercises or spiritual enjoyments. They observe, indeed, the outward forms of religion, for the sake of setting an example to others; but they have no idea of felicity to be enjoyed in the worship of God. If they see people much interested about the worship of God, they are ready to account them superstitious, and scrupulous, and "righteous overmuch;" and all the delight which they perceive to be derived from that source they impute to vanity or wild enthusiasm. But, however the multitude may prefer the pleasures of sense, we have no hesitation in saying that David's decision was wise:

1. On his side are ranged all the inspired men from the foundation of the world.

There is not a shadow of difference among them in relation to this matter. One common testimony pervades the whole Scriptures: the things of time and sense are invariably represented as of no value, in comparison with the things which are invisible and eternal; and the possession of the whole world would be a fool's choice, in exchange for the soul!

Now, when there are so many witnesses, all unconnected with each other, and living at times and places so distant from each other, and all inspired by an unerring God, must we not conclude that their testimony is true, and that David, in according with them, was true also? The whole Inspired Volume must be set aside as an imposture and a delusion, if David's preference was not such as wisdom dictated, and God approved.

2. On his side are even the ungodly, in their hours of more serious reflection.

As giddy as the people of the world are, and ready to pour contempt on all serious religion, there is not one who does not sometimes say in his heart, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" The consciences of men will sometimes speak; and they will acknowledge that they have never found that satisfaction in earthly things which they had once hoped to find; and that true religion alone can bring solid peace into the soul.

And here I will venture to appeal to every individual, whether on some particular occasions, perhaps on the death of a friend or in a time of sickness, or after some faithful discourse: has he not felt the vanity of this present world, and the need of securing a portion beyond the grave? And whether, on such occasions, he have not envied the state of those, whom, in his more thoughtless seasons, he has ridiculed?

Yes, Herod revered John, because he knew him to be a just and holy man; and Felix trembled, because he could not controvert the statements of Paul; and scarcely is there an ungodly man to be found, who has not, on some occasion or other, justified in his mind, if not in his words, the sentiment avowed by David in our text.

3. On his side is every man, the very instant he enters into the eternal world.

Do you think that there is a man in Heaven who is not like-minded with David? Or that there is one in Hell who would not assent to it as a truth which he could no longer doubt? Here on earth, men are blinded by their love of earthly things; but in the eternal world they view things as they really are; nor is there one to be found either in Heaven or in Hell that would not prefer the state of Lazarus with all his privations to that of the Rich Man with all his indulgences. Whence was it that the Rich Man was so anxious to send a messenger to his five surviving brethren? Was it not to undeceive them, and to make known to them the proper mode of estimating the things belonging to their peace? So, if it were permitted, would they who are daily and hourly going into the eternal world; gladly would they send to warn their surviving relatives; but that cannot be; and if we will not believe Moses and the prophets, we shall learn the truth when it is too late to avail ourselves of it. But all this may serve at least to show us that the decision of David was truly wise.

Learn, then, from hence:

1. How to form a right estimate of your state.

You must not judge of yourselves by your actions only, but by the desires and habits of your minds and hearts.

What is your taste? Is it for communion with God in holy exercises—or is it for the vanities of this present world?

God himself teaches us to judge of ourselves by this standard, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires! [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5)." If your taste accords with that of David, it is well; you have so far an evidence that you are the Lord's; but if it is the reverse of his, deceive not yourselves, "you are yet in your sins," children of the wicked one, and heirs of wrath.

2. How to make your profiting to appear.

Cultivate this high and heavenly disposition. Let the things of this world sink in your estimation. Sink, I had almost said, into absolute insignificance; and let communion with God be the delight of your soul. Let it be a small matter to you whether you have more or less of the honor that comes from man; and seek the honor that comes from God alone; and "let your conversation be more and more in Heaven, from whence you look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," with whom you hope before long to participate an eternity of bliss!

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PROMISES TO THE UPRIGHT

**[Psalm 84:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11-12)**

"The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly! O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in You!"

The choice which every true Christian makes, affords matter of astonishment to the ungodly world. He prefers a life of godliness with all the odium attached to it, before all the pleasures and honors which he could possibly enjoy in the ways of sin. Those who look no further than to the concerns of time and sense, are amazed that so many sacrifices should be made without any visible recompense. Doubtless the choice of Moses must have been deemed marvelously absurd in the palace of Pharaoh, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26); as that also, which David deliberately made, must have been among his ungodly courtiers. But the reason assigned for it was sufficient to justify him in the eyes of every rational being, verse 10, 11. "I had rather," etc. "For," etc.

His words lead us to show,

I. The character of true Christians as here described—those who walk uprightly.

"They walk uprightly" both towards God and man. Integrity in our dealings with man is an essential part of true uprightness—yet it is far from being the whole of what is comprehended in that term. Many act honestly from a mere sense of honor, while they pay no regard at all to their duties towards God. But sincere Christians act in a very different manner, they have respect to God in everything, that they may approve themselves to him.

True Christians search out their duty **diligently**.

A child of God will not conclude hastily that he knows his duty. He is aware of the deceitfulness of sin, and the wickedness of his own heart. He knows that, if he blindly follows the dictates of an unenlightened conscience, he may commit murder itself under the idea of doing God service! [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2). [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9). He therefore desires to have his judgment informed. For this end he reads the Holy Scriptures; and begs the Spirit of God to guide him into all truth; He is glad of instruction and reproof from his fellow-creatures, that he may be preserved from error. And the one desire of his heart is, to be freed from every undue bias; and to fulfill in all things the will of God.

True Christians perform their duty **uniformly**.

Every true Christian labors to do unto others as he would have others do unto him. But he does not rest satisfied with this. He strives to maintain the mastery over all his motives and principles of action; He endeavors to have his tempers regulated according to the Word of God, and the example of his Lord and Savior; He moreover watches unto secret prayer. He lives a life of communion with God; and of dependence on God. He would not make any exceptions or reserves; He longs to be free both from partiality and hypocrisy; and desires rather to descend from a throne to the place of a door-keeper in God's house for the maintenance of his integrity, than to rise from the place of a door-keeper to a throne through the smallest violation of his duty, verse 10. He says with David, I esteem all your precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way! [Psalm 119:128](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.128). And with him also he prays, "O that my ways may be directed to keep your statutes! [Psalm 119:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.5)."

What delight God has in such characters we may see, if we consider,

II. The blessedness that shall be given to those who walk uprightly.

We are here distinctly told what God will be to those who walk uprightly. There is scarcely anything noble or useful in the sphere of nature or of art, which is not used to illustrate the goodness of God towards his people.

God will be **a sun** to those who walk uprightly.

How welcome is the sun to one who has been groping his dubious way during a long and dreary night. This metaphor must not be taken in its full extent, but only in reference to a traveler. His path is now made clear, and he is enabled to avoid the stumbling-blocks which before obstructed his progress. Nor are its beams less refreshing to his body, than its light is useful to his feet. He now shakes off the anxieties and cares with which he was before disquieted. He feels his spirit exhilarated; and prosecutes his journey with ease and pleasure.

Thus does God arise on those who have been sincerely occupied in doing his will. He causes light to arise in the darkness, [Psalm 112:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.4). Even when they were in darkness, he was a light unto them, [Micah 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.8); but now he dispels all the clouds, and shines upon them with healing in his beams! [Malachi 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.2).

How sweet the change when the light of God's countenance is thus lifted up upon them!

How plain is now the way of duty, which before was dark and intricate!

And how pleasant is it to "run the way of his commandments, now that their feet are set at liberty!"

God will be **a shield** to those who walk uprightly. The more upright they are, the more will Satan and the world combine against them. Men will strike at them with the sword of persecution; and Satan will cast at them the fiery darts of temptation. But God will "compass them with his favor as with a shield." If they are wounded, he will heal them again, and overrule their momentary pain for their greater advantage.

As for their head, he will surely protect it in the day of battle. He will perfectly secure them from every fatal blow. Nor shall any weapon that is formed against them be ever allowed finally to prosper! [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17).

While God himself thus becomes their light and protection, he informs us further,

God will give **grace** to those who walk uprightly!

Certain it is that he must have given them prior grace, or else they never would have been able to attain to real uprightness. But, as their conflicts increase, he will give them more grace, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6). As particular occasions call for it, he will give them seasonable grace, even in the very time of need [Hebrews 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.16). And if their temptations should exceed all that ever were experienced by man, he will give them grace sufficient for them, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9). "My grace is sufficient for you," is his Word to every soul, however buffeted by Satan, or ready to sink under the violence of his assaults. "They shall receive continually out of Christ's fullness, even grace upon grace."

God will give **glory** to those who walk uprightly!

His favors to them shall not terminate with their present state of existence. He will not only make them more than conquerors here, but will give them an unfading crown of righteousness and glory in the eternal world! Whatever felicity the angels enjoy in Heaven—that shall his saints also participate in. And as our first parents were banished from the tree of life for yielding to the tempter, so shall they, who resist and overcome him, be admitted to the tree of life that grows in the midst of the paradise of God, and shall never leave forever! [Revelation 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.7).

God will withhold anything that is truly good from those who walk uprightly!

Were wealth and honor good for them here below, they would possess it. If God withholds those things from his people now, he does it because he knows that they would not, on the whole, be good for them. He who gave his own Son to die for them, will assuredly give them all other things that will promote their eternal welfare. They shall never lack anything for body or soul, for time or eternity.

INFERENCES.

1. How truly blessed are those who are upright before God!

This is the Psalmist's own reflection, verse 12. He varies indeed the term by which he describes the people of God; but his meaning is the same; for none can be upright except those who trust in him, because nothing but the grace of God can make them so; nor do any trust in him without receiving that grace which shall make them upright.

The manner in which he expresses his reflection, is worthy of notice; he does not merely assert it as a fact, or appeal to men for the truth of it, but appeals to God himself respecting it. "O Lord God Almighty, how blessed is the man who trusts in you." How strong must have been the conviction of it in his mind! And can anything be more clear? To have the Lord God himself for their light and defense, and to have all the blessings of grace and glory ensured to them by the unalterable promise of Jehovah—what more could they have? Let every upright soul then rejoice; for he is and shall be blessed. And let all be stirred up to walk worthy of their high calling. So shall God be glorified in them; and they, before long, be glorified with him for evermore.

2. In what a pitiable state are the generality of mankind!

There are many who are honest and just, even among the heathen. But, alas! the generality labor not in earnest to find out their duty; nor do they know anything of that unreserved devotedness to God which characterizes the true Christian.

Is God then a sun to them? Is he not rather a cloud of darkness to them, or rather, I should say, a consuming fire? [Exodus 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.20). [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29).

Is he a shield to them? Is he not rather an irresistible adversary? [Matthew 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.25).

Will he give them grace and glory? Shall he not rather visit them with wrath and fiery indignation? [Romans 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.8).

Will he withhold from them no good? Is there not rather a time shortly coming when they shall not have so much as a drop of water to cool their tongue?

O that men would consider this! Surely their state calls for much compassion. Let every one lay this to heart. Let every one seek to be found "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." And let it be the one ambition of us all to be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless! [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14).

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ATTENTION TO GOD'S WORD ENCOURAGED

**[Psalm 85:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.8)**

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak; for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly!"

If we would obtain any blessing from God, we must seek it in the exercise of fervent prayer. Yet shall we not really obtain a blessing, unless we look up to God in expectation of an answer to our prayers. In this respect we must resemble a beggar who supplicates for alms. He is not satisfied with having presented his petition; he waits for an answer; and never considers himself as having succeeded in his requests, until he is in the actual enjoyment of the desired blessing. This waiting spirit was exemplified in David, when he said, "In the morning I will direct my prayer unto you, and will look up! [Psalm 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.3)." In like manner it is illustrated in the Psalm before us, which seems to have been written after the Babylonian captivity, but previous to the complete and quiet settlement of the people in their own land. The petitions which are offered are extremely urgent, "Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation! [Psalm 85:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.4-7)."

The petitioner, then, determines to listen to God's voice, in the hope that he shall, in due season, receive an answer of peace, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

Let us, for the elucidation of this subject, consider,

I. The attention which we must pay to the Word of God.

The Word, whether as contained in the inspired volume, or as delivered to us by the ministers of Christ, is truly and properly God's; and, as his, it should be received by us with the deepest reverence. When Paul ministered at Thessalonica, the people "received his Word, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God;" and for that he specially commends them, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13). And thus, whether written or preached, God's Word must be received by us. Whether we open the inspired volume ourselves, or go up to hear it in the house of God, we must, like Cornelius and his family, place ourselves as in the immediate presence of God, "to hear all that is commanded us of God, [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33);" and with meek submission we must say, like Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening, [1 Samuel 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.10)."

But in our text we are informed,

II. What particular reason there is for that attention to the Word of God.

"The Lord will speak peace unto his people and to his saints;" however much they have deserved his wrath and indignation, he will not retain his anger against them, if only they give ear to his Word, and set themselves diligently to obey it. To the impenitent he never utters a single word of peace; but to the humble and contrite soul, that relies on his promises in Christ Jesus, there is not a syllable throughout all the inspired volume that leads to discouragement; grace, mercy, and peace are held forth to all of this character. These, though but in an infantile state, are God's "saints and people;" and for them are prepared "a peace that passes all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!" Shall such tidings, then, be announced, and the trembling soul not listen to them? If there were nothing but precepts proclaimed, they should be listened to with the most reverent attention; but, when nothing but the voice of love and mercy sounds in our ears, it would be strange indeed, if we do not hear it with the devoutest gratitude, and treasure it up in our minds as a source of the richest consolation.

With this attention, however, must be blended a regard to,

III. The ultimate scope and object of all God's gracious declarations.

Sin, under whatever circumstances it is committed, is "folly" in the extreme; and to turn us from that folly is the true end of all that God has done for us! "Our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for us, to deliver us from this present evil world, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous for good works! [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." To him, therefore, we must cleave in a way of holiness, never for a moment turning back to our evil ways, or even so much as "looking back after having once put our hands to the plough! [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62)." For whatever we may have experienced, it will all cease to be of any value in the sight of God, the very instant we depart from his holy ways [Ezekiel 33:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.18). Yes, it will be "better never to have known the way of righteousness at all, than after having known it, to depart from it! [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.21)." It is "by patient continuance in well-doing that we must seek for eternal life, [Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7);" and only by enduring to the end, can we ever attain the promised salvation, [Mark 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.13).

Let me, then, ADDRESS.

1. The inattentive hearer.

God speaks in his Word; but the generality of the world, though within reach of the sound, hear him not, "They have no ears to hear." But let me ask: Will you be always able to shut your ears against his voice? Will you not hear him when he shall summon both the living and the dead to his tribunal? Will you be deaf to his voice when he shall pronounce upon you that awful doom, "Depart from me, you who are cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!"

If, then, you must listen to him in that day, would it not be wise to regard him now? Be assured the day will come when you will regret that presumptuous indifference which now you manifest; and when, if you turn not to him in sincerity and truth—then you will "call upon the rocks and mountains in vain to hide you from his wrath!"

2. The backsliding professor.

What have you gained by returning to the world? Nay, have you not lost the peace which you once enjoyed? You may pretend to possess a quiet mind; but you do not. Or, if you do, it is only by drowning the voice of conscience, and silencing its remonstrances. Compare the penitential sorrows which you once felt, with the liveliest joys that you now experience; and then say, whether you were not really happier when weeping for your sins, than you now are when launching into either the cares or pleasures of the world? I well know the answer you must give, if you will speak truly; and therefore you, of all men, are constrained to acknowledge the folly of sin! "Remember, then, whence you have fallen, and repent; and do your first works! [Revelation 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.5)." But if you will not repent and turn to God, then prepare to meet him in judgment, and to receive at his hands the just recompense of your deeds!

3. The obedient saint.

It is your privilege to have your "peace flowing down like a river." And such it will be, if you apply to your souls the many "great and precious promises" which are given you in the Gospel. Search them out, therefore, and treasure them up in your minds. Hear God himself speaking to you in them; and so embrace them, as to live upon them, and to derive from them all the consolation which they are calculated to impart. In this way will you be kept from spiritual declension, and will be enabled to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God! [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

#643

THE attributes of God RECONCILED IN CHRIST JESUS

**[Psalm 85:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.9-10)**

"Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other!"

We are told in Scripture, that "the prayer of the upright is God's delight;" and in instances without number has he evinced the truth of this saying. If only we wait upon him with humility, and listen to his voice, "he will speak peace unto us, verse 8." The writer of this Psalm, which was most probably composed after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, records for our instruction, that he sought not the Lord in vain. The people, though restored, found many difficulties to encounter; and the Psalmist earnestly entreated God to perfect for them what he had begun, and to establish the nation in righteousness and peace, verses 1-7. In answer to this prayer, God assured him, not only that the blessings which had been solicited should be conferred, but that the more glorious redemption which was shadowed forth by those events, should in due time be accomplished. In this sense of the passage all the best interpreters concur; and it perfectly accords with the general language of the Prophets, which, in addition to the literal meaning, has also a spiritual or mystical sense; and which, under images apparently relating only to one peculiar people, has respect to Christ and his Church to the end of time. Taking the words then in a prophetic sense, we may notice in them:

I. The obstacles on God's part to the salvation of man.

When man fell, the "truth and righteousness" of God required that the penalties of his transgression should be executed upon him.

To man in Paradise, God gave liberty to eat of every tree in the garden, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; but in reference to that tree he said, "In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die!" This death comprehended not merely the dissolution of the body, but the destruction also of the soul, even that everlasting destruction from which the second Adam has delivered us; according as it is written, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord! [Romans 5:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12-19); [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23)."

From the moment therefore of his transgression, man became liable to this punishment; and the truth of God was pledged to inflict it. Moreover, God as a righteous Governor could not but maintain the honor of his law. His justice was engaged not to allow the violations of that law to pass unpunished.

This presented an apparently insurmountable obstacle to man's salvation.

To say that God could not have found some other means of satisfying the demands of truth and righteousness, would be presumptuous, because the resources of his wisdom are infinite; but we are perfectly justified in saying that he could not save man unless some way of satisfying the demands of truth and righteousness were found. However God might desire to exercise mercy, and to be at peace with man—he could not do it at the expense of any other of his perfections. Paul himself frequently assigns this limit to the divine procedure, "God cannot lie," says he; and again, "It is impossible for God to lie;" and again, "God cannot deny himself." Again he says, "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" It is plain, therefore, that unless a way could be found for "mercy and truth to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other," no hope could be entertained for fallen man; the judgments denounced against him must be executed; and, having partaken with the fallen angels in their guilt, he must partake with them also in their misery.

But, formidable as these obstacles were, we behold in our text,

II. The way in which these obstacles are removed.

All has been done for man, that was required of man.

A substitute has been provided for our guilty race. The Son of God himself has come down from Heaven, and been made under the law, that, in the very nature that had sinned, he might bear the penalty of sin, and fulfill the utmost possible demands of that law which we had broken. True it is, that the law denounced eternal death; and that Christ bore that penalty only for a season; but then it must be remembered, that he was God, as well as man; and from his godhead is derived a virtue on all that he did or suffered, a virtue which is fully adequate to the obedience or sufferings of the whole world. Indeed the law gains more honor by the *sufferings* of our incarnate God, than it ever could have gained from the sufferings of the whole human race; for, if man had undertaken to pay the penalty, no time could ever have arrived, when it might be said, "Now divine justice is satisfied, and the law has received a full compensation for the dishonor done to it;" but in the sufferings of God's co-equal Son there is "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of men."

In his obedience also to the law there is an honor done to it far beyond all that could have accrued to it from the obedience of man. That God himself should become subject to his own law, and fulfill in his own person all that is required of his creatures, is such an exalted honor to the law, that it may well be regarded as a sufficient substitute for the obedience of man, and as an adequate ground for the justification of all who shall trust in it! [Isaiah 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.21).

Thus a way is opened for man's salvation, in perfect consistency with every perfection of God.

"Truth and righteousness" are now completely satisfied. They demanded a perfect fulfillment of the law; and the law has been perfectly fulfilled; they demanded the penalty of death to be inflicted on account of sin; and it has been inflicted on the sinner's substitute.

Now as a debt, discharged by a surety, can no longer be demanded of the principal—just so, can our debt no longer be demanded of us, if we plead what Christ has done and suffered for us. And, as a thing purchased for any person, belongs to him for whom it was purchased, so we, who have all the glory of Heaven purchased for us by our adorable Emmanuel, have a right to it, if we plead the purchase he has made. Hence it appears that truth and righteousness are no longer against us, but are rather on our side; and, instead of demanding, as before, the destruction of our souls—they have become advocates for our free and full salvation. Justice now says: Pay them, O God, what their Redeemer has purchased for them! Truth says, Fulfill to them, O Lord, all that you have promised to those who believe in Jesus!

But let us more particularly consider,

III. The blessed consequences of the removal of these obstacles.

Salvation is now accessible to all; it is come both to Jews and Gentiles, "It is near unto us." To those especially "who fear the Lord," it is near, even "in their mouth and in their heart! [Romans 10:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.8-9)." No longer does the fiery sword prohibit our access to the tree of life. "Mercy" has now full scope for the freest exercise. God can now be "a just God, and yet a Savior! [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21)." He "declares his righteousness," no less than his mercy, "in the forgiveness of sins! He is just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Christ! [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26)."

Hence he proclaims "peace" to all that are afar off, [Ephesians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.17). He establishes his tabernacle in the midst of us; and invites all to come unto him, even to his mercy-seat, in full assurance of faith. "In every corner of the land his glory dwells, [Isaiah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.5);" and all who truly fear him may have daily "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

The manner in which this assertion is made, deserves particular attention, "Surely his salvation is near them those who fear him." This blessed truth admits not of the smallest doubt; it may be fully and firmly depended upon. Mercy issues from the bosom of our God, now that the obstacles to its exercise are removed.

Behold then how replete this passage is with,

1. Instruction to the ignorant.

Men differ much about the way of salvation; but this passage clearly determines who is right. That plan of salvation, and that alone, is right—which is carried into effect in perfect consistency with all the attributes of God. But there is no way that provides for the honor of God's truth and righteousness, but that which is revealed in the Gospel, the way of salvation by faith in Christ.

Nothing but Christ's obedience unto death ever did, or ever could, answer the demands of divine law and justice. Nothing but Christ's completion of that work as our Surety could enable the sinner to say to the supreme Governor of the universe, "Avert your wrath from me; for I have already endured it in my Surety! And give me everlasting glory, for I, in the person of my Surety, have fulfilled all righteousness, and perfectly obeyed your law." But the believer may adopt this language; since God himself has said, that "Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we, who had no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him." Let the uninstructed bear this in mind, and "determine to know nothing" as a ground of hope towards God, "but Jesus Christ, and him crucified!"

2. Terror to the presumptuous.

It is surprising what a measure of confidence some will express, notwithstanding neither their principles nor their conduct at all accord with the Scriptures of Truth. But we must declare to all, that both in the foundation of our hope, and in the superstructure built upon it, "Mercy and truth must meet together, and righteousness and peace must kiss each other."

We have before shown, that no one perfection of God will display itself at the expense of another; all must unite and harmonize in every work of his; it is as impossible for God in anyone instance to violate his righteousness or truth, as for him to cease from his existence.

In us also must those graces which correspond with his perfections be found in united and harmonious exercise; we must be just and true, and merciful and kind; yes, it is by our conformity to the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness, that we must judge of our state before him; for, however accurate our views of his Gospel may be, it is a certain truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "Truth must spring out of the earth, if ever righteousness shall look down from Heaven, verse 11 with [Isaiah 45:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.8)."

3. Consolation to the timid.

It is frequently among those who truly "fear God" a matter of doubt and anxiety, whether God can pardon them; they see their manifold imperfections and sins in so strong a light, that God appears to them bound, as it were, in justice, to banish them from his presence; yes, and bound in truth also to execute his threatenings upon them.

But let such people view God, not as he is in himself, but as he is in Christ Jesus. There it is that he must be seen as a God of love and peace. There it is that the drooping penitent may behold him "as a reconciled God, who will never impute to him his sins! [2 Corinthians 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.19-20)." Yes, in Christ Jesus, "God is not only merciful and kind, but faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness! [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9)."

Dismiss then your fears, O trembling saints; and put your trust in Him, who has in so wonderful a way removed all the obstacles to your salvation. The veil of the temple was rent in two on purpose to show you, that henceforth there is free access to God for every sinner upon earth, and that all who approach him in that new and living way, by faith in Christ Jesus, shall surely find acceptance with him. If God will be just in punishing the ungodly—then he will be no less just to his Son in pardoning all who plead the merit of his blood; and if he will be true in executing his threatenings—then he will be no less true in fulfilling his exceeding great and precious promises. Only rely on them, and plead them at a throne of grace, and you shall never, never be disappointed of your hope!

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A PRAYING SPIRIT EXEMPLIFIED

**[Psalm 86:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.1-5)**

"Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God. Save Your servant who trusts in You! Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long. Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You!"

True and genuine piety cannot always be certainly known by men's interactions with their fellow-creatures. Appearances may be so plausible, that they cannot, except by Him who searches the heart, be distinguished from realities. But in their interactions with God, the truth or falsehood of their profession may be clearly discerned.

The most refined hypocrite may, by examining the state of his soul in his private devotions, obtain the certain means of discovering his proper character, provided he has his standard rightly fixed, and his test impartially applied.

To furnish such a standard, is our object in the present discourse. We here behold the man after God's own heart drawing near to the throne of grace, and pouring out his soul in supplications before God; and we wish to call your attention especially to the spirit which he manifested in this sacred duty, since it will serve as an excellent criterion whereby to try and judge ourselves.

Let us then consider:

I. The subject-matter of David's prayer.

It would seem that David was now under great affliction, either from the persecutions of Saul, or from the unnatural rebellion of his son Absalom; and his prayers may well be understood, in the first instance, as relating to his temporal trials.

But, as it is of his soul that he chiefly speaks, we shall dwell upon his prayer principally in that view. Let us notice then,

1. David's petitions.

The apostle Paul, in both of his Epistles to Timothy, prays, that "grace, and mercy, and peace" may be multiplied upon him. These three terms comprehend the substance of the Psalmist's petitions.

He desired "grace," to "preserve and save his soul."

He desired "mercy." "Be merciful unto me, O Lord!"

And he desired "peace." "Rejoice the soul of your servant, O Lord!"

Now these are such petitions as every sinner in the universe should offer. There are no other petitions that can be compared with them, in point of importance to the souls of men. As for all the objects of time and sense, they sink into perfect insignificance before the things which appertain to our everlasting salvation. To all therefore I would say: Seek what David sought. Cry mightily to God to have mercy upon you, and to preserve and save your soul; and when you have done that, you may fitly pray also for that consolation and joy, which a sense of his pardoning love will produce in the soul.

2. David's pleas.

These are taken, partly, from what he experienced in his own soul; and, partly, from the character of God himself.

Observe how he urges what he experienced in his own soul. The things which God himself requires from us in order to the acceptance of our prayers are:  
a deep sense of our spiritual necessities,  
an entire surrender of our souls to him,  
a reliance on him for all needful blessings,  
and a continual application to him in a way of fervent and believing prayer.

Behold, these are the very things which David at this time experienced, and which therefore he pleaded before God as evidences of the sincerity of his prayers, "Bow down your ear, O Lord, and hear me; for I am poor and needy!" Who is there that must not adopt the same acknowledgment? Who that considers how destitute his soul is of all that is truly good, will not find these words exactly descriptive of his state?

Again, the Psalmist prays, "Preserve my soul; for I am Holy (devoted to you)." We must not imagine that David here meant to boast of his high attainments in holiness; the term "holy" is applied in Scripture to everything that is dedicated to God, though from its very nature it cannot possess any inherent sanctity; the temple of God, the vessels of the sanctuary, and all the offerings, were holy, because they were set apart for God. So David here speaks of himself as "set apart for God. See [Psalm 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.3);" and his expression is exactly equivalent to that which he uses in another place, "I am yours; save me! [Psalm 119:94](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.94)." This then is another plea which it befits us all to use.

As the Israelites were "a holy nation, [Exodus 19:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.6)," so are we, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9); and if we have given up ourselves unreservedly to God, we may well hope, that he will hear and answer our petitions.

Once more David says, "Save me; for I trust in You." This also was a most acceptable plea. If we ask with a wavering and doubtful mind, we can never succeed, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7); but the prayer of faith must of necessity prevail, [Matthew 21:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.22). [Mark 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.24). The suppliant who truly and habitually trusts in God, can never be disappointed.

Lastly, David says, "I cry unto you daily;" "Unto you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul." God "will be inquired of, to do for us the things that he has promised." "If we ask, we shall have; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened unto us, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8);" but, if we ask not, we shall not, we cannot, have, [James 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.2).

But David's chief plea is taken from the character of God himself; and this is, in reality, the most satisfactory to the human mind, and most acceptable to the Divine Majesty, who "will work for his own great Name's sake," when all other grounds of hope are subverted and lost. Towards his creatures generally, whether rational or irrational, God is "good;" but towards men he is "ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon him."

No mother is so tender towards her new-born child, as God is towards his penitent and believing people. He is far more "ready to forgive," than they are to ask forgiveness; and will multiply his pardons beyond all the multitude of their offences, [Isaiah 55:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7-9). "Where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound! [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20)."

The freeness and fullness of God's grace should be clearly seen, and confidently relied upon; but then we must never forget that this glorious perfection shines only in the face of Jesus Christ. It is in Christ only that God can pardon sinners in consistency with his justice; but in Christ, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness! [Romans 3:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.24-25)." In Christ therefore, and in God as reconciled to us through the blood of his Son—must be all our hope. If we rest solely on Christ's obedience unto death, all will be well; for "in him all the promises of God are yes, and amen, [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20)." But, if we look at God in any way but as in the person of Christ, we shall surely find him "a consuming fire! [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29)."

The prayer itself not calling for any further elucidation, we proceed to notice,

II. The spirit manifested in David's prayer.

Here the subject is peculiarly important, because it exhibits in so striking a view the dispositions of mind which we should invariably exercise in our approaches to the Divine Majesty. In this example of David, then observe:

1. David's meekness and modesty.

He approaches God, as a sinner ought to do, with reverential awe. He exhibits none of that unhallowed boldness, and unfitting familiarity, which are so commonly to be noticed in the prayers of many at this day. It is much to be lamented that many address God almost as if he were an equal. We speak not now of that irreverence with which people, altogether ignorant of religion, conduct themselves in the public services of the church; (though that is deeply to be deplored;) but of the state of mind manifested by many religious people, ministers, as well as others, in their public and social addresses to the throne of Heaven.

How different, alas! is it from that which is inculcated, both in the Scriptures! [Psalm 89:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.7). [Ecclesiastes 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.2), and in the Liturgy of our Church! In the Liturgy, the people are exhorted to "accompany their minister with a pure heart and humble voice to the throne of the heavenly grace;" and, in another place, "to make their humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling on their knees." This is a lovely state of mind, and as opposite to that which many religious people manifest, as light is to darkness. Many whose religious principles differ widely from the self-applauding Pharisee, resemble him very nearly in his spirit and conduct; but let us, on the contrary, imitate the publican, who, "not venturing so much as to lift up his eyes to Heaven, smote upon his bosom, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner!"

2. David's humility and contrition.

He felt himself a guilty and undone creature, deserving of God's everlasting displeasure; and hence he cried so repeatedly for mercy and salvation. Here again we see how the same views and dispositions are inculcated in the services of our Church. Let anyone peruse the confession which is daily offered; or that which we are taught to utter at the table of the Lord; or let him read the responses after every one of the Ten Commandments; or the repeated cries, "Lord, have mercy upon me! Christ, have mercy upon me! Lord, have mercy upon me!" and he will see at once, what a beautiful harmony there is between our Liturgy and the Holy Scriptures; and what distinguished saints all her members would be, if the Spirit of her Liturgy were transfused into their minds and hearts!

This is the state of mind which, above all, we would recommend to those who desire to find acceptance with God; for "to this man will God look, even to him who is of a broken and contrite spirit, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15); [Isaiah 65:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.2);" this is the sacrifice which, above all, God requires, and which he has assured us "he will never despise, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17)."

3. David's faith and love.

David did not so view his own sinfulness as to distrust the mercy of his heavenly Father; but rather took occasion from his own sinfulness to magnify still more the free and super-abounding grace of God.

In this, his example is especially to be followed. Nothing can warrant us to limit the mercy of our God. O how "ready is he to forgive" returning penitents! Of this, the conduct of the father towards the repenting prodigal is a lively and instructive image. In that parable, the compassion of God towards returning sinners is, as it were, exhibited even to the eye of sense.

Let us then, whatever be our state, bear this in mind, that unbelief is a sin which binds all our other sins upon us. Never, under any circumstances, should we harbor it for a moment. It is enough to have resisted God's authority, without proceeding further to rob him of the brightest jewels of his crown—his grace and mercy. The goodness of God, as described in our text, and in another subsequent part of this Psalm, verse 15; is a sufficient pledge to us, that of those who come to him in his Son's name, he never did, nor ever will, cast out so much as one!

4. David's zeal and earnestness.

The diversified petitions and pleas which we have already considered, together with the renewed urgency of his supplications in the verse following my text, verse 6, show, how determined David was not to rest, until he had obtained favor of the Lord. And thus must we also "continue instant in prayer;" we must "watch unto prayer with all perseverance;" we must "pray always, and not faint." Alas! how are we condemned in our own minds for our manifold neglects, and for our lukewarmness in prayer to God!

But we must not rest satisfied with confessing these neglects; we should remedy them, and break through our supineness, and correct our negligence, and lie at Bethesda's pool until the angel comes for our relief! This is suggested to us in our text. What we translate, "I cry unto you daily," is, in the margin, "I cry unto you all the day."

O that there were in us such a heart! O that our sense of need were so deep, our desire of mercy so ardent, and our faith in God so assured—that we were drawn to God with an irresistible and abiding impulse; and that, like Jacob of old, we "wrestled with him day and night, saying: I will not let you go except you bless me! [Genesis 32:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24); [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26); [Genesis 32:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.28) with [Hosea 12:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.3-5)." Such prayer could not but prevail; and such a suppliant could not but find everlasting acceptance with God, who is so "plenteous in mercy, so ready to forgive!"

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HOW TO WALK WITH GOD

**[Psalm 86:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.11)**

"Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I will walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name."

In mercy, no less than in judgment, does God see fit to chastise his people; he does it "for their profit, that they may in a more abundant measure be partakers of his holiness, [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10)." And when we are brought near to him by means of our afflictions, then have they answered the great end for which they were sent.

David was a man who enjoyed much communion with God; and probably it was to the extraordinary trials with which, for many years, he was visited, that he was indebted, under God, for that sublime piety which shone so conspicuously in him. In the Psalm before us, he pours out his soul before God under some great and heavy affliction, probably under the persecutions of Saul; but it had produced the most beneficial effect upon his mind; seeing that it stirred up within him more ardent desires after God, and determined him, through grace, to walk more diligently in the ways of God, "Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I will walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name."

In these words we see the two great requisites for an acceptable walk with God, which are:

I. An illumination of mind, that we may **know** His ways.

We know nothing of God or his ways, any farther than he has seen fit to reveal himself to us; (how little our unassisted reason can teach us, has abundantly appeared in all the philosophers of Greece and Rome.) Least of all can we know anything of the way which he has appointed for our reconciliation with him through the blood of his Son; respecting that no finite intelligence could have formed any conception, if it had not been made known to us by a special communication from Heaven.

But we need also—yet further, a special revelation of it to our own souls. The mere report, as contained in the written word, is not of itself sufficient to bring us to a saving knowledge of these sublime truths. Christ must be revealed in us, [Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.16), as well as to us, or we shall never "know him as we ought."

These great things are, indeed, "freely given to us by God;" yet must we "receive the Spirit of God, in order that we may know them" aright, 1 Corinthians 2:12. He must, as "a Spirit of wisdom and revelation," open the eyes of our understanding, before we can comprehend these soul-saving truths, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18). This great mystery, so as really to acquiesce in it, and cordially to come to Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)."

If the Apostles themselves, after above three years attendance on the public and private instructions of our Lord—yet needed to nave "their understandings opened, in order that they might understand the Scriptures, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45)," then there can be no doubt but that the same is necessary for us all; and that we all need to cry with David, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of your law! [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18);" or, as he speaks more fully in another Psalm, "Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths; lead me in your truth, and teach me; for you are the God of my salvation; on you do I wait all the day! [Psalm 25:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.4-5)."

To this must be added,

II. A devotion of our hearts, that we may walk in His ways.

Our heart by nature is divided among ten thousand vanities, all of which are sought in preference to God. Whatever can contribute to the satisfaction of the carnal mind becomes an object of desire; and according as our prospects of attaining it are varied—our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, are called forth into powerful and successive operation.

But in order to have an acceptable walk with God, the desires of our heart must all center in him. He will not accept a divided heart. God says, "My son, give me your heart! [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26);" and it must be given to him entirely. To him it must be exclusively devoted, in all its faculties; at least, nothing must be an object of hope or fear, joy or sorrow—but in subserviency to his glory, and in obedience to his command. "We cannot serve God and Mammon too! [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24)." There is "a singleness of eye," and "a singleness of heart," that is indispensable to a right walking with God, [Acts 2:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.46). [Colossians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.22); without that we cannot approve ourselves to "Him who searches the heart and tries the thoughts!"

ADDRESS.

1. Those who think it an easy thing to serve God.

Many have an idea that this is so easy a matter, that they may execute it at any time, whenever satiety shall have rendered them less anxious about carnal enjoyments, or the approach of death shall render a preparation for eternity more an object of desire.

But supposing it to be so easy, how great must be their guilt in neglecting it! Is it so easy a matter to please, and serve, and honor God—and will they not do it? Then "out of their own mouth shall they be judged;" and the heaviest condemnation shall be given to them, because they would rather rebel against their God and "provoke the eyes of his glory" by their impieties, than they would take on them, what they themselves acknowledged to be, his "light and easy yoke."

But if it is, indeed, so easy—then try it; and see if it is so easy to come to God in his appointed "way." See, if you can come with brokenness of heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Father through him, imploring mercy solely through the blood and righteousness of your adorable Savior. You will soon find that the proud heart of man does not easily stoop to so humiliating a way of approaching God. If you might come in your own name, and in your own righteousness, you would perhaps consent to do it; but to come with penitential sorrow in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in a simple dependence on his sin-atoning sacrifice, is a work to which you are utterly averse, and which none but God can enable you to perform.

Again, if it is so easy to gather in all the affections of the soul, and to fix them exclusively on God—then do it. But you will find that this is far beyond the power of man to effect. In order to this, you must have "a new heart given you, and a right spirit renewed within you;" nor can any power short of that which created the world at first form such a new creation within you.

Lay aside, then, your vain conceits respecting this matter; and begin, without delay, that work, which a whole life is short enough to accomplish, and which, if not wrought speedily, may soon become a subject of remediless and endless woe.

2. Those who desire, but find it difficult to serve God.

You, probably, have depended too much on the resolutions you have formed. I am far from disapproving of resolutions, if formed in dependence upon God. Joshua's resolution has been the just subject of applause in all ages, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord! [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15)."

But Peter has sufficiently shown how weak all human strength is, when unaided from on high. It is by prayer alone that we can hope to prevail, either for the illumination of our minds, or the concentration of our souls, both of which are so necessary in this good work.

David was no novice in the divine life; yet did he cry, "Teach me your ways, O Lord; and unite my heart to fear you!" And, if he had not so cried to the Lord, in vain would he have said, "I will walk in your truth." If then he, notwithstanding his attainments, still had recourse to God in prayer—then know that there is no other way for us to prevail; and that, if you would succeed according to your desire, you must cry day and night to God in prayer, and bring down from him those supplies of grace and strength which are so needful for you.

3. Those who are really walking with God according to his command.

Do not be discouraged, if you should find that, notwithstanding your good endeavors, you make not all the advance that you could wish. You yet have flesh, as well as spirit; and "if the spirit lusts against the flesh, so will the flesh still strive against the spirit, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)." You will yet find a law of sin in your members, warring against the law of your minds, and constraining you at times to cry out, "O! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death! [Romans 7:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23-24)."

But go forward, in humble dependence on God. "Continue instant in prayer." Do not let your hands hang down; but let them be stretched forth to God in continual supplications; and he will come to your relief. He will embitter to you the vanities on which you are tempted to set your affections, and will gradually get himself the victory over all the enemies of your souls. It was only "little by little that he drove out the Canaanites" before his people of old; and it is not to be expected that you should have no difficulties to contend with, no conflicts to sustain. But remember where your strength is; and, "as you have received the Lord Jesus Christ, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, and abounding therein with thanksgiving, [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7);" so will he "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom," and "present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy!"

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THE GLORY OF ZION

**[Psalm 87:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.3)**

"Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!"

The city here spoken of, is Zion; of whose praises the whole Scriptures speak. She is represented as "beautiful for situation, and as being the joy of the whole earth, [Psalm 48:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 48.2)." Even God himself is represented as delighting in her, and as "loving the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob, verse 2." Why she, and the Church which is represented by her, are so high in the estimation of God and man, it will be important to consider.

To bring the subject fully before you, I will show:

I. What glorious things are spoken of her.

Among the many things spoken of her in Scripture, she is particularly commended,

1. As the residence of God.

God chose Zion of old for his habitation, and delighted to make that above all other cities in the universe "the place of his rest, [Psalm 132:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.13-14)." There he abode in that bright symbol of his presence, the Shechinah, "dwelling between the cherubim, [Psalm 80:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 80.1)." There his people assembled by his appointment to worship him; thence he dispensed his blessings; and thence in due time he sent forth his everlasting Gospel, [Isaiah 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.3).

Thus under the Christian dispensation he has honored his Church, dwelling in it; as he has said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

There he reveals his glory, even "all the glory of the godhead, in the face of Jesus Christ."

There he makes known all the riches of his grace and love.

There he communes with his people who present their supplications before him, "drawing near to them, while they draw near to him;" and giving them answers of peace; not indeed visibly, as by the Urim and Thummim of old, but really, and satisfactorily to their souls.

In a word, though unknown in every other place under Heaven, "He is known in her palaces as a refuge, [Psalm 48:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 48.3)."

2. As the birth-place of the saints.

This is particularly noticed in the Psalm before us, "Of Zion it shall be said: This and that man is born in her, verse 5, 6." Under the Jewish dispensation conversions were comparatively few; but under the Christian dispensation they are very numerous; though at present they are only as the drop before the shower. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit was poured out in richer abundance, and thousands were converted in a day; and still, wherever the Gospel is preached in sincerity and truth, there the power of God accompanies the word, and "subdues the souls of men to the obedience of faith."

Among the heathen, Satan maintains a universal sway; and among those Christians who are not blessed with a faithful ministry, very few are ever rescued from his dominion; but where the cross of Christ is exalted, there will be found "a stir among the dry bones," and multitudes will be born to God!

May we not ask, Whether this is not confirmed by the experience of many here present! Once you were dead in trespasses and sins, and as destitute of all desire after God, as any people in the world. But, through the preaching of a crucified Savior in this place, your souls have been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Here also, when you have been mourning on account of your indwelling corruptions, God has "given you the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3)." so that you can confidently say, "I was born there." Blessed testimony, that may well endear to you the gates of Zion, and render her more lovely in your eyes than all the palaces in the universe!

3. As an emblem of Heaven itself.

Such it really is; for all who are born in her "have come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, [Hebrews 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22)." Though she is a spiritual edifice, she has her foundations, her walls, her gates; all of which are found also in that heavenly Zion which John saw, even in "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, and having the glory of God, [Revelation 21:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.10-11); [Revelation 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.14); [Revelation 21:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.21)." And both the one city and the other "are of pure gold, [Revelation 21:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.18)."

Each of them too, among the many distinctions which they enjoy above all earthly cities, have a light peculiar to themselves. Of our Zion it is said, "The sun is no more her light by day, neither for brightness does the moon give light unto her; but the Lord is unto her an everlasting light, and her God her glory! [Isaiah 60:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19)." And thus it is also in the heavenly Zion, "The city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God lightens it; and the Lamb is the light thereof, [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)."

It is but one family that is inhabiting both the one city and the other, "even the family of our Lord Jesus Christ, [Ephesians 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.14-15);" and their employments are altogether the same; for while the one are "rejoicing in the Lord always" here below, [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4), the other are incessantly engaged in singing praises to him above, even "to Him, who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto their God! To him, I say, do they ascribe all glory and dominion forever and ever, [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)."

II. The effect which these testimonies should have upon us.

Surely, when the Church is so high in the estimation of God:

1. We should inquire what place the redeemed church holds in our esteem.

Never has she had, at least in a spiritual view, any visible glory. In the days of the prophets, her limits were contracted, and her members poor, despised, persecuted. In the days of Christ and his Apostles, though her limits were enlarged, she, like her Lord himself, had "no beauty nor loveliness for which she was to be desired, [Isaiah 53:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.2)." She has been in a wilderness state even to this present hour, [Revelation 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.6), an object of hatred and derision to all that were round about her.

Yet to the eye of faith, the redeemed church is most beautiful, most glorious. In all that pertains to her, she is "the perfection of beauty, [Psalm 50:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.2)."

Her foundations are of the most precious stones, "her walls are salvation, and her gates praise, [Isaiah 60:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.18)." Her laws are all holy, and just, and good.

Her ordinances are a very Heaven upon earth.

Her chosen, redeemed and regenerate members more highly privileged than all other creatures in the universe.

Say then, brethren, whether such are your views of Zion; and whether to be enrolled among her citizens be the highest object of your ambition?

Our blessed Lord told his disciples, that even to have "the devils made subject unto them" was no ground of joy in comparison with this, [Luke 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.20); for, if you really belong to Zion, "your names are written in Heaven," and all the glory and felicity of Heaven are yours! But if you are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel—then you are strangers from the covenants of promise, without God, without Christ, without hope! [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)."

2. We should seek to advance the glory of the redeemed church.

God has promised, that, in due season, "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and that all nations shall flow unto her, [Isaiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.2)." "Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations—their kings led in triumphal procession. For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. "The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet. The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel! [Isaiah 60:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.11-14)."

Now then I ask: Should we not long for this glorious period? Should we not exert ourselves to the uttermost to help it forward? Should we not search out the benighted Gentiles, and labor to bring back to their God the dispersed of Israel? Should we not endeavor to bring men from every quarter, "their sons in our arms, and their daughters upon our shoulders, to glorify the house of his glory?"

Men may pretend to love the Church; but their professions must be brought to this test. If we are at all sensible of the benefit of belonging to Zion, we shall neither rest ourselves, "nor give any rest to our God," until "the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns, [Isaiah 62:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.1); [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7)."

3. We should labor to participate in all the privileges of the redeemed church.

Is God indeed revealed there in all his excellency and glory? Is it the place, the only place, where sinners are born to God? Is it an emblem even of Heaven itself? We should determine then to come to her without delay, and to seek admission into her blissful community. In comparison with being numbered among her children, all that the world can give should be esteemed by us as dung and dross; and we should say with David, "I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness! [Psalm 84:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10)."

As for hatred, contempt, persecution, or even death itself, they should be accounted rather as an honor, and a happiness, and a privilege—than as objects of fear, if they are brought upon us for Zion's sake. It should be a sufficient recompense to us, that our God is glorified, and that the interests of Zion are advanced, [1 Peter 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13-14). If we are children of Zion indeed, we shall be joyful under any circumstances; we shall "be joyful, I say, in our King! [Psalm 149:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.2);" as it is written, "They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd; (that is, for all spiritual consolation and support;) and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all! [Jeremiah 31:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.12)." Whether they are priests or people, it shall be thus with them; for, "I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness; and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the Lord, [Jeremiah 31:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.14)."

APPLICATION.

Let us then love Zion, and "prefer her before our chief joy, [Psalm 137:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 137.5-6)." Let her ordinances be our delight, [Psalm 84:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.4); [Psalm 84:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.7). Let us pray for her advancement, saying, "Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within her palaces." Then shall our own souls most assuredly flourish; for "they shall prosper who love her, [Psalm 122:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 122.6-7)."

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DISTRESS OF SOUL CONSIDERED

**[Psalm 88:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14-16)**

"Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me!"

Heman the Ezrahite, the author of this Psalm, is thought by most to have been the grandson of Judah, [1 Chronicles 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 2.6); and to have been so eminent for wisdom, as almost to have equaled Solomon himself, [1 Kings 4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.31). But he seems rather to have been the grandson of or Samuel, 1 Chronicles 6:33; [1 Chronicles 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 15.19). compared with the title to [Psalm 89](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89). The grandson of Judah could not have written so about David. Whoever he was, he was a man greatly afflicted, and, at the time that he wrote this Psalm, altogether destitute of any other consolation, than what he felt in spreading his sorrows before God. In other Psalms we find many and grievous complaints; but the gloom that overspreads the mind of the author at the commencement of them, is usually dispelled before they are brought to a close; and what began with sorrow is terminated with joy.

But in the composition before us there is no such pleasing change; it is nothing but one continued complaint from beginning to end. In discoursing on it, we shall point out:

I. The state to which a righteous soul may be reduced.

Truly the state of Heman was most afflictive.

There can be no doubt but that he was a righteous man. Had he not been so, he would not have addressed Jehovah in such expressions of holy confidence, as "The Lord God of his salvation;" nor could he have affirmed, that "night and day he had poured out his prayers and cries before him, verses 1, 2, 9, 13."

Yet behold, how heavy, how exceeding heavy, was his affliction! "His soul was so full of troubles, that they brought him near to the grave, verse 3." Hear how he himself represents them, referring them all at the same time to God himself as the author of them, "You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Your wrath lies hard upon me; and you have afflicted me with all your waves, verses 6, 7." To the same effect he speaks also in the words of our text, complaining of the dereliction he experienced in this hour of his calamity, and of the terrors which he endured, which, while they were rapidly bringing down his body to the grave, had well near bereaved him of his senses, and reduced him to a state of utter distraction.

And such, alas! is the state of many in every age of the Church.

Some there are of a low, nervous, hypochondriac temperament both of mind and body, and who, whether they were religious or not, would of necessity be of a melancholy disposition; that being their constitutional tendency, just as cheerfulness or confidence are the tendencies of others. People of this class view everything in a dark unfavorable light; they forebode nothing but evil; and, if religion occupies their minds, they write bitter things against themselves, and conclude that they never can be saved. They love gloomy thoughts, and brood over them day and night; and greatly injure both their minds and bodies by ruminating on subjects that are too deep for them. They perplex themselves about the divine decrees, and thus give occasion to many to represent religion as distracting their minds.

But the truth is, that they seek for nothing but poison; they have no appetite for wholesome food; and religion is no more answerable for their distraction, than a fertilizing stream is for the death of a maniac who drowns himself in it!

Some there are who are brought into this state by long and complicated troubles. The mind of man, unless supported in a miraculous way, cannot endure a pressure beyond certain limits. Even Job himself, notwithstanding his extraordinary patience, seemed at times to sink under the accumulated load of his afflictions, and to be transported beyond the bounds of sense or reason. In the same way, the dejection of many, however it appears to originate in matters connected with religion, must in reality be traced to this source; their mind is enfeebled by a complication of bodily diseases, and of worldly sorrows, and then becomes an easy prey to any discouragements which may engross its attention.

Some are broken down by means of some great transgression, which, either before, or after, their religious course, they have committed, and which has destroyed all hope of respect from man, or comfort in their own minds).

To such, life is become a burden; they cannot bear even the sight of those whose esteem they have forfeited; they desire solitude, which yet is irksome to them; and they long for death, as a relief from the torments of a self-condemning conscience. It is no wonder if such, though truly penitent before God, yield to desponding fears, and anticipate nothing but misery in the eternal world.

Some are in a more extraordinary degree than others exposed to the assaults of Satan. That powerful adversary seems, as it were, to take possession of their minds, as formerly he possessed the bodies of men; and by his fiery darts he inflicts the deadliest wounds upon their souls. He is well called, "The accuser of the brethren;" for he accuses them to God, as he did Job of old; and accuses them also at the bar of their own consciences, to prove them hypocrites and self-deceivers. Is it to be wondered at, if that roaring lion prevails over a weak and unprotected sheep? The wonder rather is, that any are enabled to withstand him.

But once more; there are some who by God himself are brought into manifold temptations, and are allowed to experience much darkness in their souls. And though at first sight it should seem as if these people were less beloved of the Lord than others, the truth is that they are often to be found among those who are his chief favorites, "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens;" and usually, those most, who are most beloved.

We cannot doubt but that Job was an object of God's peculiar favor; yet who was ever more afflicted than he, even in the very way that we are now speaking of? Hear his own words, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit; the terrors of God set themselves in array against me! [Job 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.4)." And need we say how deeply our blessed Lord himself was afflicted, when "his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and his mind was so distracted, that "he knew not what to say, [John 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27)."

That God sends these dispensations to his people in love, will appear even from our text; for Heman, who was eminent for his piety, declares, that he had been so "afflicted from his youth up." And where did he attain this extraordinary piety, but in the school of affliction? While others were intent on pleasure, he by his troubles was led to study his own heart, and to seek an acquaintance with his God; and thus he gained a knowledge which well repaid him for all that he endured. And it is a well-known fact, that those who are most exercised with spiritual troubles, are usually best instructed in "the deep things of God."

It is evident, then, that pious souls may be reduced to great distress, and that, in fact, many in every age are really so reduced:  
some through constitutional infirmities;  
some by means of accumulated afflictions;  
some by an irretrievable loss of character consequent on some heinous transgression;  
some are brought into it by the assaults of Satan;  
and some by the wise and gracious appointment of their God.

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The reflections which naturally arise from the subject.

1. How great is the evil and bitterness of sin!

If there had been no sin, there would have been no sorrow. Sorrow is the fruit of sin—the fruit which immediately sprang up, as soon as this root of bitterness was planted in the human bosom. Until Adam fell, he enjoyed the sweetest fellowship with his Creator; but after his transgression, instead of going forth as before to meet his God, Adam fled from his face, and strove to hide himself. From that moment has the world become a "Bochim"—a land of weeping and of mourning, [Judges 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.4-5).

Sorrow is that inheritance to which every man is born; and, even truly converted and holy people, as long as they continue in this valley of tears—they will, at a greater or smaller distance, be followed by two inseparable attendants, "sorrow and sighing." It is only when they arrive at the portals of Heaven, that joy and gladness will be their sole companions! Then indeed, but never until then, will that Scripture be fulfilled, "They shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away! [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.10)."

How fearfully the minds even of godly men may be oppressed, by a sense of God's displeasure against sin, will appear from the experience of David; who "ate ashes like bread, and mingled his drink with weeping, because of God's indignation and wrath! See [Psalm 38:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-2); [Psalm 102:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.9-10)."

And it yet more forcibly appears from the complaints of Job, "You scare me with dreams, and terrify me through visions; so that my soul chooses strangling, and death rather than life! [Job 7:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.14-15)."

If we look to the terrifying effects of sin on the ungodly, the sad history of Judas paints them in their true colors. Let these sorrows then, in whoever they be found, be traced to their proper source; and let this at least be learned from them, that "it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against the Lord!"

2. What obligations to God do they lie under, who are favored with any measure of peace and joy!

This point, we apprehend, is by no means duly considered. It is thought by many to be a hard thing if there be any intermission of their spiritual comfort; but the wonder rather is, that there is any intermission of their sorrow. Who that considers the desert of sin, who that views the imperfection of his best services—has not reason to adore and magnify his God, for the willingness he shows to revive the hearts of the contrite? Were God extreme to mark what is done amiss, the experience in our text would be the lot of all without exception, even of those who should find grace in the eternal world.

But, blessed be God! this is far from being the case; there are many to whom God grants the light of his countenance, and the joys of his salvation. We desire, however, that such people should appreciate aright the blessings conferred upon them; and that, instead of always complaining of darkness or of trouble, they should improve every manifestation of God's love to the furtherance of their confidence in him, and of their zeal in his service.

3. How astonishing was the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he undertook to redeem a ruined world!

He well knew, that, as the surety and substitute of sinners, he must bear all that the violated law would have inflicted upon them. And, if to us, who are by nature alienated from God—it is such a dreadful thing to endure the hidings of his face and the terrors of his wrath—then what must it be to that immaculate Lamb of God, who from all eternity "lay in the bosom of his Father," and "was daily his delight! [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18) and [Proverbs 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.30)." Yet behold, having undertaken for us, he suffered all that was due to us, "He the just, for us the unjust!" From his youth up he was"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" and, especially at the close of his life, he drank to the very dregs the cup of bitterness that must otherwise have been put into our hands. Truly "he was made a curse for us;" and so grievously did he suffer under the united assaults of men and devils, and from a sense also of his Father's wrath, that he sweat great drops of blood, and, in the midst of his severest agonies, had yet further to bewail the hidings of his Father's face, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Let us learn to estimate as we ought this stupendous mystery, of "God manifest in the flesh" to expiate by his own sufferings the sins of his rebellious creatures. O let us contemplate this mystery, until we are altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise!

4. How awful will be the state of all who die without a saving interest in Christ!

This which Heman so bitterly bewails as his portion in this world, will, in an infinitely higher degree, be the portion of all who shall perish in their sins. They will indeed be "cast out from God's sight," as objects of his everlasting abhorrence. Never to all eternity will they have one look from him, but will behold "his face turned away" from them, and "his fierce wrath" executed upon them. Truly, "while they suffer his terrors, they will be distracted." Who can conceive the distraction of their minds at the overwhelming thought of eternity? Oh! what "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth" will there be among that wretched assembly, whose agonies are so insupportable, and whose prospects are so interminable! But thus it must be, if we will not flee to that Savior, who has laid down his life for us.

Shall we not then awaken from our slumbers?

Shall we not cry unto our God, now that his ear is open to our petitions?

Shall we stay until we come into that place of torment, and have an impassable gulf fixed between him and us?

O let us "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near;" then, though we should not enjoy all that we may wish for here on earth—we shall hereafter; and even, by our occasional sorrows here, be fitted for an uninterrupted fruition of his glory to all eternity.

#648

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

**[Psalm 89:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.15-16)**

"Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted!"

Every man by nature desires happiness; but few know where it is to be found. The generality imagine that happiness will be a sure attendant on earthly prosperity. But the Psalmist points out to us its only true source, "There are many who say, who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us! [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)." In like manner he instructs us in the text, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound."

In these words the character and blessedness of the Lord's people are fully declared. Let us consider,

I. The **character** of the Lord's people.

"The joyful sound" must here import the Gospel.

In the Gospel a Savior is revealed, even such a Savior as our necessities require: a Savior who has made a full atonement for our sins, and who promises "salvation to all who come unto God by him." When this Savior was proclaimed to the shepherds, it was in these memorable terms, "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!"

But "the joyful sound" refers to the sound of the trumpets under the law, when the people were convoked to come up to God in the solemn assembly, [Numbers 10:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.1-3); [Numbers 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.10); or when the year of Jubilee was proclaimed, [Leviticus 25:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.8-13). On this latter occasion, in particular, it was indeed a joyful sound; for then all people who had sold their houses and lands, yes, and their wives and children, and their own selves too for bond-slaves, were restored to perfect liberty, and to the full possession of their former inheritance. Suppose a person so circumstanced, what a joyful sound would that of the trumpet be to him!

Such then is the Gospel to the weary and heavy-laden sinner, when he hears of a free and full salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ!

This "sound" the true believer "knows".

A speculative knowledge of the Gospel is possessed by many who have no personal and saving interest in it, and no desire after its blessings. But the true believer knows it practically; he has felt its power; he has tasted its sweetness; and he has been brought to a reliance on it for the salvation of his soul. This distinction must be carefully made by us. It is not of a head-knowledge that my text speaks; but of such a knowledge as enters into the heart, and engages all the powers of the soul. It is such a knowledge as God alone can impart; and all who possess that are truly "blessed,"

In our text we have a rich description of,

II. The blessedness of the Lord's people.

They may not have much of this world; but they have much of God.

1. They enjoy a sweet sense of God's love.

"They walk in the light of his countenance." This is a privilege of which a worldly man can form no conception; but it is understood, and experienced, by all who enter into the spirit of the Gospel. They can go to God as a Father; they know that he is reconciled towards them in the Son of his love; and with a spirit of adoption they can draw near to him, and pour out their hearts before him, and hear him speaking peace unto their souls. In answer to their daily prayers he draws near to them, and "lifts up the light of his countenance upon them," and "fills them with joy and peace in believing." Such is their daily "walk" with God—a foretaste of their happiness in the realms of bliss."

2. They enjoy a habitual confidence in God's care.

They are subjected to a variety of circumstances like other men; but they have a Friend to whom they can go on every occasion, and from whom they can receive all such communications as they stand in need of. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, to which they run and are safe!" His perfections and attributes are all exercised in their behalf; and, being their God, he is "a God unto them," doing for them whatever their diversified necessities require. In Him "therefore, even in his name, they rejoice all the day," spreading before him their every need, and committing to him their every desire. "They know in whom they have believed," and cast all their care on him who cares for them."

3. They enjoy an assured prospect of God's glory.

In the Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ reveals himself to his people as a complete Savior, who not only obtains a pardon for them, but has provided also a righteousness, wherein they may stand before God without spot or blemish. To him therefore they look in this view; and on him they rely, as "The Lord their righteousness." "In this righteousness they are exalted;" they are exalted in their own eyes, being no longer condemned sinners, but saints accepted and justified from all their sins! They are exalted in the eyes of God also; for he now "beholds no iniquity in them;" he views them as one with his dear Son, partakers of his nature, and joint-heirs of his glory. They are exalted also in the eyes of all the angelic hosts, who now delight to minister unto them, and will before long give them the precedence in Heaven, and take their station behind them before the throne of God! [Revelation 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.11)."

Say now, are not these happy? Yes; and David not only asserts it, but appeals to God himself for the truth of his assertion, "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who have no knowledge of this joyful sound.

How many among us are altogether ignorant of the Gospel itself! And of those who hear it and profess to receive it, how many have no taste for that joy which it is intended to impart! Will you then call yourselves the people of God; or imagine that salvation belongs to you? Know, that "all are not Israel, who are of Israel;" nor are all Christians who bear that name. While you are ignorant of the joyful sound, you can have no part or lot in those blessings which the Gospel is intended to convey.

2. Those who know the Gospel, but find no blessedness in it.

There are, I must acknowledge, many of this description. But whence does this arise? Is it owing to any insufficiency in the Gospel to make them happy? No; it proceeds in some cases from a disordered constitution; in others, from imperfect views of the Gospel; and in others, from not walking steadfastly and consistently before God. But from whatever source it arises, I would say, Remember what an injury you do to the Gospel itself, and to the souls of men; the world around you will impute your gloom to religion, and take occasion from it to condemn the Gospel itself as a source of melancholy to all who embrace it.

O! brethren, do not so dishonor the Lord Jesus Christ; but view the Gospel in all its freeness and all its fullness, and all its excellency; and rest not until you have attained those rich blessings, which every true believer is privileged to enjoy!

3. Those who both know and enjoy the Gospel.

Happy indeed are you, even though you are in all other respects the most destitute and distressed. Let then your gratitude to God evince itself in a suitable life and conduct. As for your joys, the world knows nothing about them; and will therefore impute them to wild enthusiasm and delusion. But they can understand a holy life; that will approve itself to them as a good and genuine fruit of the Gospel. Let them then see, that this Gospel which makes you happy, makes you holy also. Let them see that it brings into subjection every unhallowed temper, every evil desire. Let them see that in every station and relation of life, it elevates you above others, rendering you more amiable, more consistent. In a word, "let your whole conduct be such as befits the Gospel of Christ;" and, while you are made partakers of a felicity which the world knows not of, endeavor to make your light shine before men, that they may be constrained to acknowledge the excellence of your principles, and be led to seek a participation of your bliss!

#649

THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST TO SAVE

**[Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19)**

"I have laid help upon One who is mighty!"

How joyful must these tidings be, to whoever they may have respect! Suppose them to refer to an oppressed nation; the raising up to them a mighty deliverer must be a rich, inestimable blessing; and such were David and Solomon, who were raised up to govern Israel, and to put all their enemies under their feet.

But a greater than David or Solomon is here. The words spoken by God to Samuel did certainly, in their primary sense, relate to David, [1 Samuel 16:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.1); as those spoken afterwards to Nathan did to Solomon, [2 Samuel 7:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.12-16). But their ultimate reference was to Christ! Compare [2 Samuel 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.14) with [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5), who is the true David, [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.23-24) and [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5), and the Son of David, [Matthew 22:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.42). On him was laid all the help that the Israel of God required; and God the Father declared beforehand, to his holy prophets—the sufficiency of Christ to discharge the office committed to him.

Two things are here obviously presented to us for our consideration:

I. The office committed unto Christ.

What this was, may be known from the necessities of fallen man; because it was to supply them, that he was sent into the world. It was then,

1. To make reconciliation for man.

This was a work which no man could accomplish for himself; a work which all the angels in Heaven were unequal to perform. Satisfaction must be made for sin; made too, in the nature that had sinned. The curse due to sin must be borne, even the wrath of Almighty God. Who could afford us this help? Who could sustain this weight? It would crush in an instant the highest archangel. None could endure it, but God's co-equal Son. He cheerfully undertaking to bear it for us, the Father made him our substitute; that, divine justice being satisfied, and the law magnified by his obedience unto death—mercy might be extended unto us, and reconciliation be made between God and his offending creatures.

2. To effect their complete salvation.

It was not enough Jesus to die for their sin:  
they were wandering afar off, and they must be searched out;  
they were in rebellion, and must be subdued.

When brought home to their Father's house:  
they are weak, and must be upheld;  
they are tempted, and must be strengthened;  
they are beset with enemies, and must be protected;  
they must never be left to themselves one moment;  
they must have everything done for them, and in them;  
the whole care of preserving them, from first to last, must be devolved on him who undertakes for them; they must be "carried in the arms," "dandled on the knees," fed at the bosom, and be watched over exactly like new-born infants!

Nothing less than this will suffice for them. Though there are millions of them spread over the face of the whole globe, they must all be attended to as much as if there were only one. What a work was this to undertake! Yet was this "the help which God laid upon" his dear Son.

But as weighty as this office is, we have no reason to doubt,

II. Christ's sufficiency to discharge it.

To be convinced of this, we need only to consider,

1. His essential perfections.

He is said to be "mighty." But the angels are also called mighty; yet are they not therefore able to execute such an office as this. But Jesus is almighty; he is expressly called "The mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6)," even "God over all blessed forever, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)." In him therefore are all the attributes of God.

He is omnipresent, to behold the states of men.

He is omniscient, to discern the things that will be most expedient for their relief.

He is omnipotent, to effect whatever shall be most conducive to their good.

Difficulties can be no difficulties with him. He who spoke the universe into existence, can be at no loss to accomplish, everywhere, and at the same instant, whatever the necessities of his creatures may require.

2. Christ's Mediatorial endowments.

As Mediator, he has received his qualifications from God the Father; and those qualifications are abundantly sufficient for the work assigned to him. The Spirit has been given to him, not by measure, as to others, but without measure [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34), "In him, even in his human nature, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)." Hence "on him may be hung every vessel, even all the glory of his Father's house, [Isaiah 22:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.22-24)."

But, not to mention the infinite merit of his blood, and the all-prevailing efficacy of his intercession ("through which he is able to save men to the uttermost"), he has, as man, qualifications which he could not have as God. He has, from his own experience of temptation, a tender sympathy with his tempted people, and a peculiar fitness and readiness to afford them all needful support, [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18).

ADDRESS.

1. Those who do not feel their need of Christ.

You cannot be persuaded that you are in a guilty, helpless, and undone state. But why did God lay help upon One that was so mighty? Did he exert himself thus without a cause? If not, the greatness of the remedy should show you the extent and imminence of your danger. Be persuaded then to put away your high thoughts of yourselves. Beg of God that you may feel in what a helpless and hopeless state you are without Christ; and never imagine that your repentance is at all genuine, until your sense of your misery corresponds, in some measure at least, with the provision which God has made for your relief.

2. Those who are discouraged on account of their extreme weakness and sinfulness.

That you should be humbled on this account is right enough; but why should you fear? Do you suppose, that when God laid help for you upon his dear Son, he was not aware how much would be necessary for your salvation? Or, has he been disappointed in his Son, finding him, after all, unequal to the task assigned to him? Be ashamed of your unbelieving fears. Do not come to Christ, saying, "Lord, if you can, or if you will;" but cast your burden wholly upon him, and see whether he be not able and willing to sustain you.

He himself says to you, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your help! [Hosea 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.9)." This is your warrant to trust in him. "Trust in him therefore with all your heart, and he will bring to pass" whatever he sees to be needful for you. "Cast all your care upon him;" and you "shall be saved in him with an everlasting salvation!"

#650

GOD'S COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS WITH CHRIST AND US

**[Psalm 89:28-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.28-36)**

"I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure. "If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun!"

In seasons of deep affliction, when, through unbelief, we are ready to think that God has forsaken and forgotten us, it is well to look back to God's covenant engagements, whereon, as on a rock, we may stand firm amidst the tempest that surrounds us. It was under such circumstances (probably about the time of the Babylonian captivity) that this Psalm was penned. In it, the stability of God's covenant is fully declared. The fears and apprehensions of his people, as arising from his apparent violation of it, are next delineated; and it concludes with fervent adorations of God, who, notwithstanding all the dictates of unbelief, is worthy to be blessed for evermore.

For the just use, as well as understanding, of the passage before us, we shall:

I. Explain it.

There can be no doubt but that the words, in their literal meaning, refer to the covenant which God made with David respecting the continuance of his posterity on his throne, [2 Samuel 7:12-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.12-17); and which seemed to be violated, now that both king and people were carried captive to Babylon; but which, in fact, would be accomplished in all its parts; because whatever they might endure for a season, the scepter should not depart from Judah until Shiloh should come.

But there is surely a reference to Christ, who is often called David, [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.23-24). [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5). Some of the words originally addressed to David, are expressly declared to refer to Christ chiefly, yes exclusively! Compare [2 Samuel 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.14) with [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5). They must be understood therefore as containing God's covenant with Christ.

In them we see, first: God's assurances respecting Christ himself, that notwithstanding all the troubles he should experience, he should be raised from the dead. Compare [Isaiah 55:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.3) with [Acts 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.34), and have all the kingdoms of the earth for his possession, [Luke 1:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.32-33). [Revelation 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 11.15).

Next: Christ is assured respecting his people, who are his seed, that though through infirmity and temptation they may fall into sin, the Father will not utterly abandon them, or finally withdraw his love from them! [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10). [Psalm 22:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.30). [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23). [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10). [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40). He will not indeed leave them to continue in sin (for that would be incompatible with their salvation, [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14).) but he will chastise them, until they repent and turn from all their transgressions, and thus will he secure them to Christ as his inheritance, [John 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.11). [1 Peter 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5-7).

The grounds of these assurances are, lastly, specified. These are God's covenant, and his oath. Having entered into covenant with his Son, he cannot disannul it. Yet, if he were to give up to final destruction any who were Christ's spiritual seed, this covenant would be broken; seeing that some who were given to Christ would perish, and Christ, as far as relates to them, would have died in vain. Moreover, in this, the oath, which (for our consolation) he swore to his Son, would be violated; but, having sworn by his holiness, which is the glory of all his perfections, he never can, nor ever will recede. On these grounds therefore the glory of Christ, and the salvation of his people are irrevocably secured.

Lest however this consolatory passage should be abused, let us:

II. Improve it.

It evidently teaches us:

1. To cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart.

The covenant, whether made with David or with Abraham, was confirmed by God in Christ, [Galatians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.17). Every blessing of the covenant was made over to him as our head and representative, and must be received from him by faith, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19). [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). To him therefore must we look for pardon, stability, and everlasting salvation. As to him the promises were made, [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16), so in him alone are they yes, and Amen, 2 Corinthians 1:20. Let it then be our great care to be found in him [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9); and then we may rest assured that nothing shall ever separate us from him! [Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.38-39).

2. To endure with patience and thankfulness whatever afflictions God may lay upon us.

Part of God's covenant is, to "correct us in measure, [Jeremiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.11)." And, however afflicted any may be, have they any cause to say that they are corrected beyond measure? Can a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39). Surely it is far better to be chastened here, than to be condemned with the world hereafter, 1 Corinthians 11:32.

We may all see reason enough for chastisement, if we will but mark our daily and hourly transgressions. Let us therefore not so much as desire God to spare us, provided he sees that we need correction for the welfare of our souls; but rather let us kiss the rod, [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9), and improve it, [Isaiah 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.9), and adore the hand that uses it for our good! [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10).

3. To dread sin as the greatest of all evils.

Though at first sight this passage may seem to weaken our dread of sin—yet, in reality, it is calculated to impress us with a holy fear of offending God. The covenant made with Christ does indeed secure the salvation of his people; but does it provide them impunity in sin? No! On the contrary, it engages God to punish sin, yes, to punish it effectually; and never to leave his people under its dominion, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14). Is there then room to say, I shall be saved, though I continue to live in sin? No! For either God will "drive it out with the rod of correction," or leave it as an indisputable mark that we never belonged to him at all! "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God! [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9)."

Let us never then make Christ a minister of sin, [Galatians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.17); but learn from the very grace that saves us, to glorify him by a holy life! [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12).

#651

GOD'S ANGER, A REASON FOR TURNING TO HIM

**[Psalm 90:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.11-12)**

"Who knows the power of your anger? Even according to your fear, so is your wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!"

This Psalm is entitled, "A prayer of Moses the man of God." It seems to have been written by Moses on account of the judgment denounced against the whole nation of Israel, that they should die in the wilderness, verse 3. It had been already executed to a great extent, God having consumed multitudes of them in his anger, verses 5-7; and the period of man's life was then reduced to its present standard of seventy or eighty years, verse 10. From this awful demonstration of God's displeasure, he is led to this solemn reflection, "Who knows the power of your anger?" And then he prays, that the whole nation might be induced by the shortness and uncertainty of their lives to seek without delay the favor of their offended God, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

In accordance with our text let us also contemplate:

I. The inconceivable weight of God's anger.

Of course, in speaking of God's anger we must divest it of all those tumultuous feelings, which agitate the minds of men; and conceive of it as manifested only in his dispensations towards the objects of his displeasure.

Let us contemplate it then,

1. God's wrath as it appears in this world.

The whole world bears the evidence of being under the displeasure of an angry God. The creation itself, even the animal and vegetable parts, as well as the rational parts of it, is greatly changed since it came out of its Creator's hands. A curse has been inflicted on it all, on account of sin. Storms, and tempests, and earthquakes, and pestilences, and diseases of every kind, and death with its antecedent pains and its attendant horrors, are all the sad fruits of sin, and the effects of God's anger on account of sin. Death has obtained a universal empire, and "reigns even over those who have never sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," as well as over the actual transgressors of God's law.

But the anger of God is yet more strikingly visible, in those particular judgments which God has executed upon men from time to time.

Behold the plagues in Egypt, the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, and of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea!

Behold the awful judgments inflicted on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and on the myriads—who, by their lewdness, their unbelief, and their murmurings, drew down the wrath of God upon them! [1 Corinthians 10:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.8-10).

Behold fire and brimstone rained down from Heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain! Yes, and the whole world, with every living creature except those contained in the ark, swept away by one universal deluge!

These serve as solemn proofs of God's indignation against sin, and his determination to punish it according to its deserts.

There are other proofs, less visible indeed, but not less real, of God's anger, which may be found in the horrors of a guilty conscience, or the distresses of a soul that is under the hidings of his face.

Hear what was Job's experience under a sense of God's displeasure, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me; the poison whereof drinks up my spirit; the terrors of God set themselves in array against me! [Job 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.4)."

To the same effect the Psalmist also speaks, when describing the anguish of his own mind, "Your arrows stick fast in me, and your hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day. I am feeble and sorely broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart, [Psalm 38:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.2-3); [Psalm 38:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.6); [Psalm 38:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.8)." The unhappy end of Judas shows how insupportable is a sense of God's wrath, when the consolations of hope are altogether withdrawn.

But, after all, there is nothing that will give us such a full display of God's anger, as a view of the Lord Jesus Christ when "Jehovah's sword awoke against him" to inflict the penalty that was due to sin! Behold that immaculate Lamb of God sweating great drops of blood from every pore of his body, through the inconceivable agonies of his soul! Hear him in the depths of unspeakable suffering, crying, "My God. My God! Why have you forsaken me?" See him finally, dying under the load of his people's sins! Could we at all appreciate this mystery, we should indeed say, "Who knows the power of your anger?"

But let us contemplate it,

2. God's wrath as it appears in the world to come.

Of this however we can form but little conception. The terms which are used to depict the misery of the fallen angels, and of those who from among the human race have died in their sins, though exceeding terrible to the imagination, fall infinitely short of the reality.

But the very circumstance of millions of once happy angels, as happy as any that are now before the throne of God, being cast out of Heaven for their pride; and Hell itself being prepared by Almighty God for their reception, that they may there endure his wrath and indignation to the uttermost. This very circumstance, I say, may serve to show how deeply God abhors iniquity, and how fearfully he will punish it.

Of the place where they are confined "in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day," Tophet, as described by the Prophet Isaiah, may be considered as a type or emblem, "It is a place both deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it! [Isaiah 30:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.33)." And the state of the unhappy sufferers there is thus described in the Revelation of John, "They will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night." [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11)."

Yet, as terrible as this description is, it conveys no adequate idea either of the torment itself, or even of those foretastes of it, which are sometimes given to those for whom it is prepared. Well therefore may it be asked, "Who knows the power of your anger?" and well is it added, "According to your fear," that is, according to the terror which the very apprehension of it excites, "so is your wrath;" for, in truth, it not only equals, but infinitely exceeds, all the conceptions that can be formed of it.

The whole scope both of the preceding and following context leads us to consider,

II. The wisdom of seeking reconciliation with God without delay.

Notwithstanding his anger against sin, God is willing to be reconciled to sinful people.

"He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger forever." "Many times did he turn away his wrath from his people in the wilderness; and did not allow his whole displeasure to arise."

He has even sent his own Son into the world to effect reconciliation by the blood of his cross. He could not consistently with his own honor pardon sin without an atonement made for it; and, that a sufficient atonement might be made, he gave his Son to "bear our iniquities in his own body on the tree," and to "be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." For the fallen angels he made no such provision; but for us he did; and he sends forth his servants into all the world, to proclaim his offers of mercy, and to "beseech sinners in his name to be reconciled to him".

To seek reconciliation with him then is our true wisdom.

The world may account it folly, and may stigmatize all serious piety as needless preciseness; but we hesitate not to declare with David, that "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom, [Psalm 111:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.10);" and that the prodigal's return to his father's house was an evidence, not, as his ungodly companions would say, of weakness and folly, but of his having attained a soundness of mind and judgment; for it was "when he came to himself he said, I will return, and go to my father!"

Who that reflects upon the inconceivable weight of God's anger, and on the misery of those who are exposed to it, would continue one moment liable to it, when God is offering him pardon, and beseeching him to accept of all spiritual and eternal blessings?

But add to this, the shortness and uncertainty of human life. Who that considers this, would delay to deprecate God's wrath, and to avail himself of the present hour to secure the offered mercy? O beg of God to impress your minds with a sense of the shortness of time, and to "teach you so to number your days, that you may without delay, apply your hearts unto wisdom."

As obvious as this lesson is, you can never learn it, unless you are taught of God. You will be ever calculating upon months and years to come, when "you know not what a single day may bring forth." You may even, like the Rich Fool, be promising yourselves "years of ease and pleasure," when God may have said, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you! [Luke 12:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.19-20)." To turn unto God instantly is true wisdom; to put it off to a more convenient season—is pure folly and madness, "Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, [Psalm 119:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.60). [Hebrews 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-8)."

But, to this work you must "apply with your heart"—your whole heart.

It is not by seeking merely, but by "striving, to enter in at the strait gate," that you are to obtain acceptance with your God [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24). You must "apply your heart" unto wisdom; and "whatever your hand finds to do, you must do it with all your might! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who make light of God's wrath.

There are, alas! too many who do this. As David says, "[Psalm 10:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-6) In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself: Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble! [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-5);" and, with atheistic impiety, "says in his heart, God will not do good; neither will he do evil, [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)."

But consider, brethren, whether you will think so lightly of God's judgments when you shall have begun to feel the weight of them? Think whether, on first opening your eyes in the invisible world, and beholding the face of your incensed God, you will not bewail your present supineness, and curse the day when you listened to the dictates of sinful men, instead of attending to the counsels of true wisdom? O! think, "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger! [Nahum 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Nah 1.6)." "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings! [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14)."

I beg you to number your days, not as the world does, but as God directs you; and to consider every day as if it were to be your last! This, with God's blessing, will stir you up to redeem the present time, and will put energy into your exertions in "fleeing from the wrath to come." Whatever your age may be, my advice is still the same; for "you know not whether your Lord will come in the evening, or at midnight, or before the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning." "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, I would persuade you! [2 Corinthians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.11);" and "what I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch!"

2. Those who are in a state of reconciliation with him.

Doubtless there are many among you, who can say with the church of old, "Though you were angry with me, your anger is turned away, and you comfort me! [Isaiah 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.1)." To you then I would say, "Who knows the power of God's love? According to your hope, even your most optimistic hope, so is his mercy!" Yes, and infinitely above all that either men or angels can conceive.

Compare your state with that of those who are now lifting up their eyes in the torments of Hell; and say whether eternity itself will suffice to express your obligations to Him who has redeemed you by his blood, and to the Father who has accepted that atonement in your behalf! O! bless your reconciled God without ceasing. Labor to count, if it were possible, the riches of his grace; and to explore "the height and depth and length and breadth of his incomprehensible love." And let the stupendous mercy given unto you, quicken you to every possible expression of gratitude to your adorable Benefactor!

#652

SATISFACTION IN GOD ALONE

**[Psalm 90:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.14)**

"O satisfy us early with your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!"

We are told, on most unquestionable authority, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8)." We are further assured, that "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace, [Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17)." This was the conviction of Moses, when he penned this Psalm.

The vanity and bitterness of sin had been deeply felt by all that generation whom he had brought out of Egypt; and here, he declared that there was no happiness but in God; he prays, "O satisfy us early with your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!" Now, brethren, longing as I do for the happiness of you all, both here and in the eternal world, I will show:

I. Where, and where alone, true satisfaction can be found.

The whole world is inquiring, "Who will show us any good?" And to that there is but one answer to be given; namely this, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us! [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)."

Satisfaction is not to be found in any earthly pursuit.

Pleasure, however diversified it may be, can never satisfy a rational being. Solomon drank more deeply of that cup than any other man; and after imbibing all worldly pleasures, pronounced it all to be "vanity and vexation of spirit."

The same may be said of wealth and honor; they can never fill the desires and capacities of an immortal soul. As the eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing—so no man that attains the greatest eminence can be sure that he has reached the highest pinnacle of his ambition. Let him possess all that mortal man can possess, and there will be some Naboth, whose vineyard he covets; or some Mordecai, who wounds him by refusing to pay him the homage he demands.

Nor is satisfaction to be found in any religious services which are performed with a self-righteous view.

Doubtless a self-righteous man may be gratified for a season with the notion that he has established a ground of confidence before God; but at times there will arise in his mind such thoughts as these, "Have I done enough to secure for me the forgiveness of my sins, and to purchase the blessedness of Heaven?" And, after all his labor, he will feel some secret misgivings that all is not right. He has not a standard whereby to measure his attainments, except indeed the holy Law of God; and that altogether condemns him. In this state of uncertainty, he cannot contemplate death and judgment without a degree of alarm, which casts a gloom over his prospect of the eternal world, and to a certain degree embitters also his enjoyments in this present world.

That which alone can afford solid satisfaction to the soul, is, the having obtained "mercy" from the Lord.

Every man is conscious that he has sinned, and must give an account of himself to the Judge of the living and the dead. But, if he has fled for refuge to Christ, and embraced the salvation offered him in the Gospel, he is ready to go into the presence of his God. He knows "in whom he has believed, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12);" and has no doubt but that through the Redeemer's righteousness he shall find acceptance with God. He will be able to say, "I know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, I have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1)." In Christ he sees all that he can need; and, being "in Christ," he is assured that "there is no condemnation to him, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1)"—either now or at the bar of judgment. "Believing in Christ, he has peace with God," and rejoices before him "with joy unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

This point being ascertained, let us direct our attention to,

II. The blessedness of those who seek satisfaction from God's saving mercy.

Saving mercy, once obtained from the Lord, is the richest balm of life!

1. God's saving mercy constitutes the chief felicity in youth.

Who is there that has sought the Lord in early life, and did not experience the benefit of that blessed employment beyond his most optimistic expectations? Nay, I will ask, Who ever spent one hour in penitential exercises, and in crying to the Lord for mercy—and did not find more satisfaction in that hour than in all the pleasures he ever enjoyed? Who does not look back to such a period, as the happiest hour of his life? I will gladly concede to every man the liberty of passing judgment on himself; and will venture to abide the verdict which every man shall give. Into whatever state of carnal pleasures such a one may have turned aside, I can have no doubt but that, in seasons of reflection, he says, "Oh that it were with me as in times past!"

2. God's saving mercy renders us happy amidst all the most afflictive circumstances of life.

Every man is, sooner or later, brought into trouble; for "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." But a sense of God's pardoning love upon his soul will more than counterbalance all his afflictions. "Being justified by faith, and having peace with God, he will glory in tribulations," of whatever kind they are, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1); [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3). He will see his trials to be a rod in his Father's hand! [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9); and he will acquiesce in the dispensation, from the assurance that "all things shall work together for his good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)," and shall ultimately "work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17)."

3. God's saving mercy administers consolation to him, even on the bed of death.

How blessed were the reflections of Paul when in the daily expectation of a cruel death! "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall grant me in that day! [2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8)."

Such was Jacob's consolation in his dying hour, "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord [Genesis 49:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.18)."

Yes, brethren, a sense of God's pardoning mercy upon the soul will take away the sting of death, and make us rather to "desire that we may depart and be with Christ! [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23)," in the full fruition of his glory!

ADDRESS.

1. The **young**.

It is never too "early" to seek, and to obtain, "mercy" from God. We read of several who from their youth were sanctified unto the Lord; and why should not you be numbered among that highly-privileged class? You have an idea that the good things of this world, and the enjoyment of all pleasurable amusements, will make you happy. But if you will transfer this notion to spiritual things, and seek your happiness in them—I pledge myself that you shall be satisfied to the full; for of all the ransomed of the Lord it is said, "They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD—the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty, declares the LORD! [Jeremiah 31:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.12-14)." Indeed, you have a promise peculiar to yourselves; for God has said, "Those who seek me early, shall find me! [Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.17)."

2. The **busy**.

I would not have anyone neglect his proper occupation in life. We are as much bound to be "diligent in business," as we are to be "fervent in spirit;" in the one, as well as in the other, we may "serve the Lord, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11)." But, in comparison, our zeal in the service of God should swallow up that which we exercise in reference to the world. Our Lord says, "Labor not for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life! [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27)."

I will suppose that you succeed to the utmost extent of your wishes in this world—what satisfaction will it afford you in the eternal world, if you have not secured "an inheritance among the saints in light?" There is no occupation whatever that can justify a neglect of your eternal interests. There may be other things desirable; but this a needful, yes, "the one thing needful;" and therefore I say, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and leave it to God to "add other things to you" in the measure which in his unerring wisdom he shall see fit! [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33).

3. Those advanced in life.

Our text has a peculiar force as it relates to you. Much of your time is gone; and what is done either by you or for you, must be done quickly. There is, indeed, no time to be lost. The work of the soul is not to be left to a dying hour! Truly, that is but an unfavorable season for such a work; and the reality of it, when commenced at that season, is always dubious. Be in earnest now. Delay not another hour. Cry mightily to God:

"O satisfy me early with your mercy!"

"Blot out my transgressions as a morning cloud." Wash my sins away in my Redeemer's blood!

"Bring me out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon the rock, and establish my goings; and put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto my God! [Psalm 40:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.2-3)."

"Then I will bless you while I live; I will lift up my hands in your name; my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate upon you in the night-watches! [Psalm 63:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.4)."

"Yes, when my flesh and my heart fail, you shall be the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!"

#653

THE BEAUTY OF JEHOVAH IMPARTED TO HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 90:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.17)**

"Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!"

It is pleasing to think that in every age the Lord has many "hidden ones;" even as in the days of Elijah, who thought himself the only worshiper of Jehovah, while there were in reality "seven thousand men who had not bowed their knee to the image of Baal."

It is not every one who dies apparently under the displeasure of God, that will be visited with his judgments in the world to come. Many "are judged by the Lord now, in order that they may not be condemned with the world hereafter, [1 Corinthians 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.32)." Among those who died in the wilderness for their transgressions, we know, infallibly, that some were received to mercy. We have no more doubt of the salvation of Moses and Aaron than we have of any saint from the foundation of the world. And we think that there is evidence in the Psalm before us, that many repented in the wilderness, and that though "they were delivered, as it were, to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, their spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, [1 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.5)." When they found that the sentence passed against them could not be reversed, they humbled themselves before God for their iniquities; and in consequence thereof they found favor in his sight, passing their remaining days upon earth in some measure of peace, and enjoying a hope, that, though they were never to possess the earthly Canaan, they would be admitted to the enjoyment of a heavenly inheritance. Their supplications for mercy were such as God never did, nor ever will, reject. "O satisfy us early with your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days wherein you have afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let your work appear unto your servants, and your glory unto their children; and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." That is: Let us have such tokens of your love, and such communications of your grace, as may carry us forward with comfort, and prepare us for your more immediate presence.

For the further elucidation of my text, I will endeavor to show,

I. What is the beauty of the Lord?

But in attempting to speak on such a subject, I feel that I shall only "darken counsel by words without knowledge;" for "we cannot by searching find out God, we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection." Yet, as we are able, we must declare him unto you, and set forth his perfections.

1. God's perfections as existing in **himself**.

We need only to open our eyes and survey the visible creation, to be assured of his eternal power and godhead. In this respect the most ignorant heathen, in neglecting to worship him, are without excuse. The magnitude and number of the heavenly bodies, all moving so exactly in their respective courses, and fulfilling the ends for which they were designed; and the variety and beauty of the things existing on this terraqueous globe, all so adapted for their respective offices and uses, and all subservient to one great design, the glory of their Creator—evince that his wisdom and goodness are equal to his power.

I am aware that academic men have no advantage over those of less intelligence in things which are known only by revelation; because those things can be known only by the teachings of God's Spirit; and the Holy Spirit can instruct one as easily as another, and does often "reveal to babes what is hidden from the wise and prudent."

But in the things which are obvious to our senses they have a great advantage, because by their proficiency in different sciences they attain a comprehensive knowledge of many things, of which the generality of people have no conception; and consequently, they can discern traces of divine wisdom, and goodness, and power, which can never come under the view of one that is illiterate and uninformed.

If from the works of creation we turn our eyes to the dispensations of Providence, we shall see all the same perfections illustrated and displayed to yet greater advantage; because they show how entirely every created being, however unconscious, or however adverse, fulfills his will, and executes his designs.

But it is in the work of redemption that the attributes of God must be chiefly viewed; because in that are displayed his justice, his mercy, and his grace; for the exercise of which there is, in the works of creation and of providence, comparatively but little scope.

But, to discover these, we must view,

2. God's perfections as displayed in the person of **his Son**.

The Lord Jesus Christ is called "the image of the invisible God, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15)," because in him Jehovah, "who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen or can see, [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16)," is rendered visible to mortal eyes; so that in him we see "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)." We know that "in his face all the glory of the Godhead shines;" and that on that account the god of this world is so anxious to blind our eyes, and to hide him from our view, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4).

See then in Jesus, and in his cross—not some perfections only, but all, even all the perfections of the Godhead shining in their utmost splendor. Draw near to the garden of Gethsemane, or to Mount Calvary—and there take a view of your adorable Savior. How awful does the justice of God appear, when not one sinner in the universe could be received to mercy, nor one single transgression of God's law be pardoned, until an atonement should be offered for it—not by any creature, but by the Creator himself, whose blood alone could expiate our guilt, and whose righteousness alone could serve as a sufficient title for our acceptance before God.

How brightly does God's sovereign mercy appear, in that, rather than man should perish after the example of the fallen angels, God given to give his only dear Son to die for us, and to effect our reconciliation by the blood of his cross!

What wisdom too is displayed in this way of making the truth of God, which denounced death as the penalty of sin, to consist with the happiness and salvation of those who had committed it! As the Psalmist says, "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other! [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)." To make these perfections unite in the salvation of men, and to bring to every perfection far higher glory than it could have had if it had stood alone; (for while each shines in its own proper glory, each has a tenfold luster reflected on it by the opposite perfection with which it is made to harmonize;) this required the utmost possible effort both of wisdom and grace; and to all eternity it will form the chief subject of adoration and praise among all the hosts of Heaven.

Here is God seen as "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, while he by no means clears the guilty, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7);" because their guilt has been expiated, and a righteousness has been wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ, so that God is "a just God, and yet a Savior, [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21)," and is no less just than he is merciful, in every exercise of his pardoning love, and in every blessing which he bestows on his redeemed people! [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9).

The petition offered respecting this, leads us to inquire,

II. In what respects we may hope that "this beauty shall be on us."

Had the prayer been offered by Moses alone, like that, "I beseech you, show me your glory, [Exodus 33:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18)," then we might have supposed, that it was a peculiar favor which other saints had no right to expect. But the prayer was uttered by multitudes, even by the great mass of those who repented in the wilderness; and therefore it may be poured forth by all true penitents among ourselves, who may expect that:

1. This beauty of the Lord shall be upon us **by an outward manifestation of it to our MINDS**.

To the Corinthian Church was this honor given; for "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness at the first Creation, shined into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)."

Such manifestations therefore may we also expect. The Lord Jesus Christ has expressly promised, that he will manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world; and with such convincing evidence will he show us his glory, that we shall differ from those around us, as Paul at his conversion differed from his attendants; they heard a voice as well as he; but he alone was favored with the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ himself! [Acts 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.7). [1 Corinthians 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.1); 1 Corinthians 15:8; so that the words which we hear or read may be heard or read by thousands; but to us only, that is, to those only who are truly penitent and believing, will he "manifest forth his glory," so as to constrain us to cry out, "How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty! [Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.17)."

It is by the public ordinances chiefly that he will make these revelations of himself to us; and hence it was that David so exceedingly delighted in the house of God, saying, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, which I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4)." If only we come up to his house with raised expectations, and a humble mind—he will reveal himself to us, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and show us "his power and glory as he is accustomed to display them in his sanctuary, [Psalm 63:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.2)."

2. This beauty of the Lord shall be upon us **by an inward communication of it to our SOULS**.

"God originally made man after his own image, [Genesis 1:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.26-27);" and after the same image will he create us anew "in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)." It is for this very end that he so reveals himself in his ordinances; namely, that, by communing with him there, our faces may be made to shine, as the face of Moses did, [Exodus 34:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.29-30); and that "by beholding his glory, we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

In this sense the beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon all his children, according as it is written, "He who has this hope in him, purifies himself even as he is pure! [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)." No inferior standard will they aim at; they know their duty; and they know their privilege; and with no attainments will they be satisfied, until they "are holy, as God is holy;" and "perfect, even as their Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

This indeed will not be imparted to anyone at once—it is a progressive work. People must be babes, and young men, before they are fathers. But from the time that they are truly converted unto God, they will "grow in grace," and "make their profiting to appear," until they have "attained to the full measure of the stature of Christ, [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13)."

To all of you then I would say: Offer up with devoutest earnestness to God the petition in my text, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us;" and add to it that prayer of Paul for the Ephesian converts, which in import corresponds exactly with it, "May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God! [Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18)."

From the text thus explained, we may **learn**:

1. What is the great antidote to the troubles of life?

Certainly the Israelites, when doomed to perish in the wilderness, were in a very pitiable condition. But, if they could only attain this great object, they declared that their sorrows would all be turned into joy. Whatever our troubles may be, their sting will be taken away if they prevail to bring us to the footstool of our God, and to the enjoyment of the light of his countenance.

The trials which God sends are for this very end: to purge away our dross, and to purify us as gold—that we may be vessels of honor, fit for our Master's use.

Let us then not be so anxious to get rid of our afflictions, as to obtain from God a sanctified use of them . . .  
 in brighter manifestations of the loveliness of Jesus,  
 and richer communications of grace from Him,  
 and a more entire conformity to Him!

Let us but get even a small measure of these benefits, and "our consolations shall abound far above all that our afflictions have abounded, [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5)."

2. What we are to aim at in our pursuit of holiness.

It is not any one grace, or any particular set of graces, that we should seek after—but an entire conformity to the image of our God. Now his beauty, as we have seen, consists not in anyone perfection, but in a union of all perfections, however opposite to each other. So must there be in us, not such graces only as are suited to the natural temperament of our minds, but an assemblage of all graces, however different from each other—every one being blended with, and tempered by, its opposite, and all together brought, as occasion may require, into united exercise.

God is compared to "light;" which is a union of rays, exceedingly diverse from each other, and all in simultaneous motion. Now as some may think that the brighter colored rays, as the red, the orange, the yellow, would make a better light if divested of those which bear a more somber aspect, as the blue, the indigo, and the violet—so many imagine that God would be more lovely, if his justice were separated from his attributes, and mercy were to shine unalloyed by that more formidable perfection. But as neither can light part with any of its rays, nor, God with any of his perfections, so neither must the Christian dispense with any grace whatever.

If he rejoices, it must be with trembling. If he walks in faith, he must be also in the fear of the Lord all the day long. If he is bold, he must also be meek and lowly of heart, and resemble him, who "was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he did not open his mouth." This union of opposite graces it is which constitutes the beauty of holiness; as David, after the most exalted strains of adoration, says, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before him all the earth! [Psalm 96:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 96.7-9)."

Let me earnestly entreat every professor of religion to be attentive to this matter. Nothing is more common than for people of this description to value themselves on account of some particular grace or set of graces—when they are offensive, and, I had almost said, odious in the eyes both of God and man, for lack of those graces which ought to temper and moderate the actings of their mind. Distortion in the human frame is not more disgusting than such distorted piety as this.

Even without any particular blemish in the human frame, it is not any one feature that constitutes beauty; but a regular and harmonious set of features. So it is not faith, or fear, or zeal, or prudence, or any other separate grace, that will assimilate us to God—but every grace in its proper measure, and its combined exercise; or rather every grace borrowing from its opposite its chief luster, and all harmoniously exercised for the glory of God!

Were this subject better understood, we would see, as in Christ, so in all his followers also—the God and the man; the lion and the lamb.

#654

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

**[Psalm 91:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.1-4)**

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart!"

To unfold the doctrines and duties of our holy religion is a matter of indispensable necessity to every one who would discharge the ministerial office with acceptance. Yet it is not necessary that a minister should always be laying the foundation of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; there are times and seasons when he should "go on unto perfection, [Hebrews 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.1)," and exhibit Christianity in its highest stages of practical duties. The Psalm before us will afford us ample scope for this.

According to these verses, we have a clear exposition of the character and blessedness of every true believer. Let us consider, then,

I. The true believer's **character**.

He is not described either by his religious creed or by his moral conduct. We are led to view him rather in his secret walk with God.

1. View the believer's character portrayed **figuratively**.

It will be remembered that God dwelt by a visible symbol of his presence in the tabernacle; and that the high-priest on the great day of annual atonement went within the veil, and abode there until he had sprinkled the blood of his sacrifices upon the mercy-seat, and covered the mercy-seat with his incense.

Now, what he did physically once in the year, the true Christian does spiritually every day in the year; for through Christ we all are "made kings and priests unto our God."

Paint to yourselves, then, the high-priest in his occasional access to God; and there you see the Christian going continually within the veil, or rather habitually dwelling there, and "making God himself his habitation, verse 9." And truly this is "a secret place," of which an unconverted man has no conception; it is "the secret of God's pavilion, the secret of his tabernacle [Psalm 27:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.5)."

But we must divest ourselves of the notion of locality; for this place is wherever God manifests his more immediate presence; and therefore David beautifully calls it, "the secret of his presence! [Psalm 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.20)." There the believer dwells; and, O! who can conceive "the fellowship which he there enjoys with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3);" while they, with condescending and affectionate endearment, come to him, and abidingly feast with him, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23). [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20).

In truth, the communion between God and the soul is such as no language can convey. It is nothing less than a mutual indwelling, resembling that which exists between the Father and the Son; they being in God, and God in them; yes, and being one with God, and God with them! Compare [John 6:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.56) and [1 John 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.15-16) with [John 17:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21-23).

This is a mercy which the believer alone enjoys. But some little idea of it may be formed from the favor conferred upon the camp of Israel in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud and fire led them in all their way, affording them shade by day from the heat of the burning sun, and light throughout the night season. To no other people under Heaven was this ever given.

And so it is with the camp of the true Israelites at this day, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29)." They, and they only, behold the light of God's countenance in the night-season of adversity. They alone are sheltered from everything that would oppress and overwhelm their souls; as it is written, "Then the LORD will provide shade for Mount Zion and all who assemble there. He will provide a canopy of cloud during the day and smoke and flaming fire at night, covering the glorious land. It will be a shelter from daytime heat and a hiding place from storms and rain! [Isaiah 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.5-6)."

2. View the believer's character portrayed **in plain terms**.

The workings of his mind and heart, under all the trials and difficulties which he has to encounter, are here set forth. He is convinced that no created arm can be sufficient for him. Hence he directs his eyes towards the Creator himself, and says of him:

"He is my refuge" from every trouble!

"He is my fortress" against every assailant!

"He is my God," all whose powers and perfections shall be employed for me.

"In Him I will trust," in Him only and exclusively; in Him always, under all circumstances; in Him, with perfect confidence and unshaken trust.

The Christian man is not like the ungodly world, who know not what to do, and are at their wit's end when trouble comes. The believer is "in the secret place of the Most High;" and, where others can see nothing, he beholds "chariots of fire and horses of fire all around him, [2 Kings 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.17)." Or rather, he beholds "God himself as a wall of fire round about him, [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5)," and has the very glory of God resting on him, 1 Peter 4:14.

Thus is the true believer distinguished from all others, "he beholds Him who is invisible! [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27);" and walks us in his immediate presence, saying, "If God is for me—then who can be against me?"

Shall this be thought an exaggerated description? I do not say that the Divine presence is equally realized by all Christians, or by any Christian equally at all times. There are seasons when a Peter may be "of little faith, [Matthew 14:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.31);" and a Paul may need a special revelation for his support, "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city! [Acts 18:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.9-10)."

Nevertheless, in the general habit of their mind, their language is like that of David, "I love you, LORD; you are my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and he saved me from my enemies! [Psalm 18:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.1-3)."

With such views of the believer's character—you can have no doubt of:

II. The true believer's **blessedness**.

Here let the abruptness of the address be borne in mind. The Psalmist, instead of proceeding, as might have been expected, to declare the blessings which a person of this description should receive, addresses himself to that person in these animated terms, "Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart!" Now, in these terms, the Psalmist, in the very name of God himself, and in the most assured manner, pledges to the true believer:

1. The protection of God's **power**.

If war were raging in our country; or pestilence, like that which desolated Judea after David had numbered the people, and which probably gave occasion to this Psalm, were carrying off multitudes all around us—we would enter more fully into the subject before us, and see more forcibly the exalted privileges of the true believer.

But we must remember that there is a moral "pestilence" raging all around us, and sweeping myriads into the pit of destruction!

We should remember, too, that there is a demonic "fowler," who entangles, in his net, millions, unwary as the silly bird, and "leads them captive at his will! [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)."

What is the example of men in every walk of life, but one deadly contagion, from which it is almost impossible to escape?

And what are those lusts and temptations with which we are continually beset, but baits whereby the devil seeks to ensnare us to our everlasting ruin?

Who can preserve us from all of these snares, but God himself! Little will human wisdom or power avail against such potent spiritual enemies. Peter imagined himself secure enough from denying his Lord, when he formed so steadfast a resolution respecting it; but, as our Lord had forewarned him, "the rooster did not crow twice, until he had denied him thrice." And whoever Satan should get into his sieve, he would prove us all to be chaff—if we would be left without timely support from God! [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31).

But "God will keep the feet of his saints, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9)," and not allow them to fall a prey to the destroyer. The care of a mother hen over her brood is well known. When a bird of prey is hovering over them, she calls them under her wings, and there preserves them in perfect safety. The bird of prey, when searching for them, can behold nothing but the mother hen.

Thus will God preserve his people from all their enemies, "He will cover them with his feathers, and under his wings shall they trust!" Yes, "their lives shall be hidden with Christ in God," beyond the reach of harm; and because "Christ himself is their life, when he shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)." What was done by God for Israel in the wilderness, shall be done by him for every soul that puts its trust in him! [Deuteronomy 32:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9-12).

2. The protection of God's **faithfulness**.

For every believer the very truth of God is pledged; and "life is promised" to him by the "God who cannot lie, [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2)." It is not said that the believer shall not be tempted, or "be in heaviness through manifold temptations; but that he shall not be finally overcome, as the Apostle says, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)."

Here, I say, the very faithfulness of God is pledged; and we may be sure, that "of all the good things which he has promised to his people, not one shall ever fail! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

No doubt they may through weakness be overcome for a season, as the lives of the most eminent saints but too clearly prove. But in such a case God has told us how he will act towards them, "But if his descendants forsake my instructions and fail to obey my regulations, if they do not obey my decrees and fail to keep my commands—then I will punish their sin with the rod, and their disobedience with beating. But I will never stop loving him nor fail to keep my promise to him. No, I will not break my covenant; I will not take back a single word I said. I have sworn an oath to David, and in my holiness I cannot lie! [Psalm 89:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-35)."

Of course, we are not to understand this of one who willfully and habitually lives in sin; for, whatever he may profess, he is no child of God, but a downright hypocrite! But of the weakest of real saints it is spoken (and to him it shall assuredly be fulfilled; for "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish! [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14)."

For a just **improvement** of this passage, let it be remembered,

1. In what way alone we can have access to God.

We have spoken of the believer as "dwelling in God;" but how did he come into that sanctuary? and where did he find a door of entrance? This is a point that should be well understood. There is but one way to the Father; and that is by Christ. Our blessed Lord himself tells us this, when he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me." It must never be forgotten, that in ourselves we are altogether departed from God; and that we can be "only brought near by the blood of Jesus." It was by the blood of his sacrifice alone, that the High Priest, of whom we have before spoken, could come into the holy place of the Most High, [Hebrews 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7). In the same way, it is by the blood of Jesus alone that we can venture into the holiest, [Hebrews 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19), or presume to ask anything at the hands of God, [Hebrews 10:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.20-22). I beseech you, therefore, to bear this in remembrance, and never to call God yours, until you have come to him in his appointed way.

2. What is that kind of confidence which we ought to maintain.

It must not be presumptuous confidence, that overlooks the use of means or supersedes the necessity of holy fear. Satan could not be better served than by such confidence as that. And hence it was, that, in tempting our blessed Lord, he cited this very Psalm, and urged a part of it as a warrant for him to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple; saying, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning you; and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone, verse 11, 12 with [Matthew 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.6)." Our Lord's reply to him shows us our duty in relation to this matter, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."

In the same way, we are not needlessly to expose ourselves to dangers, in the expectation that God will preserve us; nor are we to neglect the use of means, as though God were engaged to work miracles in our behalf. We must be humble, watchful, diligent; as it is written, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure."

God has, indeed, engaged to "give us both to will and to do;" but, while we depend on him for his effectual aid, we must "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13)." In every step of our way to Zion, we must cry, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe."

3. What should be the frame of our minds after we have come to him.

I have said, 'We should fear;' for "blessed is the man who fears always." But this fear should temper, not weaken, our confidence in God. Hear what the Prophet Isaiah says, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you; because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever; for with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength! [Isaiah 26:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3-4)."

Paul maintained to the uttermost, the fear of which we have been speaking; for he "kept his body under control, and brought it into subjection; lest that by any means, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)." But his confidence in God was entire. He defied all the powers in the universe to separate him from the love of God! [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39). And you, also, may possess the same blessed hope, "knowing in whom you have believed, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand!"

#655

THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO DWELL IN GOD

**[Psalm 91:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-10)**

"If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent."

It is scarcely possible to conceive any terms more strong, or any images more lively, than those in which the Scripture represents the privileges of believers. We need look no further than to the Psalm before us for a confirmation of this truth. The whole Psalm may be considered as the believer's charter, in which all his privileges are contained, from his first acceptance with God to the consummation of his happiness in glory.

We have in the words of our text a just description of the believer:

I. The believer's **experience**.

The true Christian is one who has been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Being once brought to God, he "makes the Most High his habitation." He regards God, not merely as reconciled to him, but as affording him what a dwelling-house affords to its possessor:

1. The believer's **free access to God**.

A person goes familiarly to his house at all times, not doubting but that he shall gain a ready admission into it. He considers it as his own, and feels that it exists only for his accommodation.

It is thus that the believer goes to God as his God; he has "access to him with boldness and confidence;" he is certain that, when he calls, he shall receive an answer; and "when he knocks, the door will be opened to him." In this precise view the Psalmist speaks of God, "Be my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort, [Psalm 71:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 71.3)."

2. The believer's **necessary provision**.

Every man, whatever be his situation in life, expects to find in his own house the things suited to his necessities. He does not seek his meals at the houses of his neighbors, but in his own; and he returns home at stated seasons to partake of them.

And where does the believer go for daily supplies of bread for his soul? It is in Christ Jesus that his fullness is treasured up; and in him the believer expects to find the "grace that is sufficient for him." God invites him to come to him for the express purpose, that he may be filled and satisfied with good things, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness! [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2)."

3. The believer's **sure protection**.

If storms descend, or dangers threaten, we take refuge in our house, and find it a place of safety. Thus "The name of God also is a strong tower, into which the righteous man runs and is safe! [Proverbs 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.10)." It is to himself that God invites us, when he says, "Come my people, enter into your chambers, shut the door about you, and hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation be over and past, [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20)." And that this was a primary idea in the mind of the Psalmist, appears from the very words of the text, wherein he calls God "his Refuge," and from the whole scope of the Psalm, from the beginning to the end. With this also agrees the beautiful description given of Jesus by the Prophet, as "a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest! [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2)."

4. The believer's **sweet repose**.

To his house a man retires from the noise and bustle of the world; and there he lays himself down to rest after the fatigues of the day. Home, though inferior in many respects to places of temporary residence, is to almost all people the most agreeable, because they are most at ease. And such is God to the believer.

"In every place, God is to him as a little sanctuary, [Ezekiel 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.16)," where he finds himself at rest. He carries his needs to God, and "casts all his cares on him," and enjoys that peace which passes all understanding. In this sense he says for his own encouragement, "Return unto your Rest, O my soul;" and attests for the glory of his God, "Lord you have been our dwelling-place in all generations! [Psalm 90:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.1)."

In connection with this experience of the believer, let us consider:

II. The believer's **privilege**.

The expression in the text seems to exceed the bounds of truth; but the more it is examined, the more will it be found to be strictly true. The man who makes God his habitation shall have no real evil befall him:

1. No real evil befall him in this present world.

No casual evil shall befall him. There is no such thing as chance; everything, even to the falling of a sparrow, is ordered of the Lord. As for the children of God, "their heavenly Father has given his angels charge over them, to keep them in all their ways, verses 11, 12;" and if anything were to happen to them, they (the angels) would contract a fearful responsibility for their neglect.

We must not however imagine that believers are at liberty to rush into needless dangers; for our Lord, when tempted by Satan to cast himself from a pinnacle of the Temple in expectation that the angels would preserve him from injury, replied, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God;" but nothing can happen to them except by the Divine appointment; they are hidden in the shadow of their Father's hand, and "their very hairs are all numbered."

But it may be thought that penal evil may come to them. This however we utterly deny. That they may be "visited with the rod," we readily acknowledge; but there is a great difference between the vindictive arm of an incensed judge, and the gentle chastisements of an indulgent parent. The cup of suffering that may at any time be put into their hands may be bitter; but it has not in it one drop of wrath; it is altogether mixed by love; and not an ingredient can be found in it, which they themselves shall not one day confess to have been beneficial.

In short, no real evil shall befall them. That they may have troubles, is certain; that their troubles may be heavy and accumulated, is also certain. But who accounts even the amputation of a limb evil, if it is the only and infallible method of preserving life? Much less then are any sufferings to be accounted evil, which the believer can ever be called to sustain; for he shall never endure any, which shall not work for good to him in this life, and be the means of increasing his weight of glory in the next! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28) and 2 Corinthians 4:17."

2. No real evil befall him in the eternal world.

It is in this life only that the believer can meet with even the semblance of evil; when he goes hence, he is instantly placed beyond the reach of harm. No sin, no sorrow, no pain, no temptation, no weariness, no need—can ever be felt by him in the mansions of bliss. He will there enjoy forever one unclouded day! and his happiness will be without alloy, without intermission, without end [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4)."

To render this subject more **instructive**, we shall add:

1. A word of **direction**.

Christ, in reference to the sheepfold of his church, says, "I am the door; if any man enters in by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture, [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.9)."

The same figure we may apply to the subject before us, "Christ is the door;" he is "the way to the Father;" and "no man comes unto the Father, but by him."

To those who come to God in any other way, he is not "a Refuge," or "Habitation," but "a consuming fire! [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29)." But if we believe in Christ, then "will he dwell in us, and we shall dwell in him, [John 6:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.56);" yes, "he will be our house of defense, to save us forever! [Psalm 31:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.2)."

2. A word of **warning**.

Who, except the believer, can apply to himself the promise in the text? As for the unbelieving and disobedient, they are in danger every hour; they know not but that God's wrath may break forth against them the very next moment to their destruction. Of this they are certain, (whether they will believe it or not,) that in a little time his judgments shall overtake them, and the greatest of all evils shall befall them—unless they repent!

O that they would be prevailed upon to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before them! O that they would now seek to be "found in Christ!" Then the destroying angel would pass over them, and "they should dwell safely, and be quiet from the fear of evil, [Proverbs 1:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.33)."

3. A word of **encouragement**.

The weakness of men's faith often robs them of the comfort which it is their privilege to enjoy. Why should a believer be afraid of thunder and lightning? Were he but sensible what a Protector he has, he would feel assured that no evil could come unto him. How varied are God's promises to him in the Psalm before us! How diversified also are the assurances given him by Eliphaz in the book of Job, [Job 5:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19-24). Let him only commit himself to God, and he has nothing to fear.

Let us then, beloved, have faith in God; and let those words of David be our song in this land of our pilgrimage, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah! [Psalm 46:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-3)"

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THE CHARACTER AND PRIVILEGES OF THE GODLY

**[Psalm 91:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.14-16)**

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

The Scriptures are the charter of the Christian's privileges. They contain the most minute and accurate description of his character, and set forth, in all the variety of expression that language can afford, the blessings he enjoys.

The declarations concerning him in this Psalm may certainly be interpreted as relating to the Messiah, because when a passage out of it was applied to Christ, he did not deny its reference to himself, but showed with what limitations the passage was to be understood. Compare verse 11, 12 with [Matthew 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.6-7).

That it refers also to the church cannot admit of doubt. Throughout the whole of it the character and blessedness of God's people are delineated; but with peculiar force and beauty in the concluding verses. In discoursing upon them we shall consider,

I. The **character** of God's people.

They "know the name" of God.

The name of God as proclaimed by himself, is recorded in the Scriptures, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin! [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7)," and the Christian has a view of him as possessed of those very perfections which are there ascribed to him. He particularly sees these perfections harmonizing, and glorified, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; or, if he is not perfectly clear in his views of these things, he at least is sensible that the divine mercy flows only in one channel, and can be imparted only through the sin-atoning blood of Christ.

They so know him as to "set their love upon him."

It is not a mere speculative knowledge that Christians possess (in this the ungodly may far surpass them), but such a practical knowledge as influences their heart and life. They feel a saving interest in every perfection of God. The justice and holiness of God are as amiable in their eyes as his love and mercy. From what they know of him they are constrained to love him, yes, to "set their love upon him," with intenseness of desire and fixedness of affection.

They wait upon him in continual prayer.

Others may keep up an outward form of devotion, or even be exceedingly earnest in prayer on some particular occasion; but they alone can maintain a real fellowship with God, who have been taught by the Holy Spirit both to know and love him. When they have been thus enlightened and renewed, they will feel the necessity, and taste the sweetness, of secret prayer, and will account it their highest honor and happiness to have access unto their God at the throne of grace! Nor will they ever be satisfied with the worship they offer, if they do not "worship him in spirit and in truth."

In perfect correspondence with their character will be found,

II. The **privileges** of God's people.

There is nothing good which shall be withheld from them in time or eternity.

1. God will grant to them **answers to prayer**.

They who offer their petitions only in a formal manner, never expect an answer to them. They conceive that all testimonies from God respecting the acceptance of our prayers are delusive and enthusiastic in the extreme. But God is at no loss to impart to his people a clear and lively sense of his approbation. He most assuredly will answer them, though not by tokens that may be heard or seen—yet by sensible communications, and effectual interpositions.

Are they laden with guilt? Their burden shall be removed, and they shall be filled with peace and joy.

Are they bowed down under trials and temptations? they shall be strengthened by his grace, and be made more than conquerors over all.

And though they cannot infallibly conclude from any feelings of their mind that God has answered their prayers—yet their feelings, in conjunction with the effects produced by them, will enable them to ascertain it, at least sufficiently for their own encouragement, [Psalm 138:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.3).

2. God will grant to them **deliverances from trouble**.

The people of God are exposed to troubles no less than others. But they are supported under them by the presence of their God. As the Son of man walked with the Hebrew youths in the furnace, so will he with all his afflicted people; nor shall a hair of their head be singed.

As a refiner he will carefully watch over every vessel, moderating the heat that would injure it, and bringing out the vessel as soon as his purposes in submitting it to the fire have been fully answered. This is twice declared in the text; and in due season shall it be experienced by every true believer.

3. God will grant to them **present honor**.

The saints are, for the most part, loaded with contempt and ignominy. Yet the very people who persecute them most, have frequently, like Herod, an inward reverence for them in their hearts. But however they may be treated by the ungodly, they are universally respected by the saints. The very angels account it their honor and happiness to minister unto them. They are lights in the world, and living witnesses for God to all around them; and "God himself is not ashamed to be called their God." They are already exalted to the rank and dignity of God's children; and are made "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

4. God will grant to them **everlasting glory**.

How far length of days is to be expected as the reward of piety under the Gospel dispensation, we cannot absolutely determine. But the true Christian will be "satisfied with his life," whether it is long or short. He does not wish for the termination of it merely because he is dissatisfied with his present state, but because he longs for his inheritance. He has Pisgah views of the promised land even here; and as soon as he has finished his appointed course, God will show him his full salvation; causing him to behold all its glory and enjoy all its blessedness. Then shall be given to him a life which will fully satisfy his most enlarged desires. God will say to him, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, 'Come you servant, whom I have decreed to "set on high," see the kingdom that was prepared for you from eternity; take possession of it as your own, and inherit it forever! [Matthew 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34).'

INFERENCES.

1. In how pitiable a state are the ignorant and ungodly world!

Being ignorant of God, and destitute of any real love to him, they have no part or lot in his salvation. They are strangers to all those sublime pleasures, which are communicated to God's peculiar people. The witness of the Spirit, and many other unspeakably precious tokens of the divine favor, are withheld from them. If they are in trouble, they have no heavenly consolations to support them. They may have the wealth of this world, and the honor which comes of men; but they can expect no salvation from God, nor anything but shame and everlasting contempt, [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2). O that they were wise and would consider these things!

2. How plain and simple is the duty of God's people!

The privileges before mentioned, are all bestowed on us because we love and seek the Lord. Not that our services are meritorious, and can claim a "reward of debt;" but God has appointed these as means, in the use of which we shall attain the end.

Would we then have more abundant tokens of God's favor here, and secure a still richer inheritance hereafter? Let us study to "grow in the knowledge of him," and in a more fervent and fixed love towards him. Let us wait upon him more earnestly and with greater constancy in prayer. Thus shall his blessings infinitely exceed our highest expectations, and be enjoyed by us when the fleeting vanities of time shall be no more.

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GOD ADMIRED IN HIS WORKS

**[Psalm 92:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 92.4-5)**

"For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!"

To man, in this valley of tears, God has opened many sources of happiness; many in his fellowship with his fellow-man, but more and greater in communion with his God. In truth, if it is not his own fault, he may have in a measure the felicity of the Paradisiacal state restored to him; for though, through the weakness of the flesh, "he is in heaviness through manifold temptations," he has a God to go unto, a God ever at hand, in whom it is his privilege always to rejoice, "Rejoice in the Lord always," says the Apostle; and "again," he adds, "Rejoice."

The frame of David's mind, in the Psalm before us, (for we can scarcely doubt but that the composition was his,) being that which we should cultivate, we will consider,

I. The works which he contemplated.

It is probable that the writer of this Psalm had primarily in his view the wonders of creation; because the Psalm was written for the Sabbath-day See the title to the Psalm, which was instituted to commemorate God's rest from his creating work. Yet, in the body of the Psalm, much is spoken respecting the dispensations of God in his providence; and David, whom I consider as the author of it, had experienced the most wonderful interpositions in his behalf; so that, among all the children of men, there was not one who had more cause than he to sing of "the loving-kindness and the faithfulness of Jehovah;" of his "loving-kindness," in selecting him to such high destinies; and his "faithfulness," in accomplishing to him his promises in their full extent. But the language of my text necessarily leads our minds to that greatest and most stupendous of all God's works, the work of Redemption.

This may be treated either in reference to Redemption generally, as wrought out for us by the incarnation, and death, and resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ; or with a special reference to anyone of these topics which may be suited to a particular season. But, in whatever way it is treated, the greatness of the work must be the point chiefly insisted on.

II. His experience in the contemplation of them.

He was filled,

1. With triumphant joy.

It is not possible to view these wonders of Redeeming Love, and not feel the reasonableness of that command, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4)." Well does the Psalmist say, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." It is indeed good, at all times verse 2, and in every possible way verse 3. In this holy exercise should every faculty of our souls be engaged [Psalm 103:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1).

2. With adoring gratitude.

This, after all, is the fittest expression of our joy. The wonders of God's love are so stupendous, that all attempts to celebrate them aright must fail; and silence, the profoundest silence, on such a subject, if proceeding from an overwhelming sense of it, may justly be accounted the sublimest eloquence. The Psalmist's experience was of this kind verse 5,; as were Paul's also, when he exclaimed, "O the depth [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are strangers to this frame.

Alas! how little is this state of mind experienced by the generality of Christians! and in what humiliating terms is their insensibility described in the words following my text! I would not speak offensively, or wound the feelings of any; but I would ask you, whether David speaks too strongly, when he characterizes such people as "brutish and fools verse 6. You well know that the prophets often speak the same language [Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.3) and [Jeremiah 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.7); and I beg you to repent of your insensibility, that these characters may no longer attach to you.

2. Those who aspire after it.

Let your thoughts soar to high and heavenly things; and especially let them be occupied on the works of God, and on his perfections as displayed in the great mystery of Redemption. Surely you shall not long meditate on these things in vain. Your God will cause you to "triumph in Christ Jesus." But never rest, until you have those overwhelming views of Christ which characterize the worship of Heaven. The glorified saints and angels all fall upon their faces before the throne; seek you the same frame of mind with them; and soon you shall join with them in everlasting hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb.

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THE BELIEVER'S SECURITY

**[Psalm 92:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 92.12-15)**

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Well may we be filled with gratitude, while we contemplate the wonders of creation and of providence, verses 1-5; but deeper far are the wonders of redeeming love, secured as they are to the saints by the immutable attributes of God. "A brutish man, indeed, knows them not; nor does a fool understand them, verse 6," but those who "are anointed with that heavenly unction which teaches them all things, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27)," have an insight into them, and can attest the truth of the assertions of the Psalmist, while he declares,

I. The privileges of the righteous.

"The righteous" are indeed highly favored of the Lord. To them, amidst innumerable other blessings are secured,

1. Stability.

"The palm-tree and the cedar" are trees of most majestic growth; the one retaining its foliage all the year, and the other pre-eminent in respect of strength and durability. And like these shall the righteous "flourish;" nothing shall despoil them of their beauty, nothing shall subvert their souls; They may indeed be assailed with many storms and tempests; but they shall not be cast down; or, if cast down, shall not be destroyed, [Job 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19). [Psalm 34:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.19). [2 Corinthians 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.8-10). Being once "planted in the house of the Lord, they shall flourish in the courts of our God," never withering for lack of nourishment, [Psalm 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.3) and [Jeremiah 17:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.8), nor ever decaying by the lapse of years [Isaiah 65:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.22).

2. Fruitfulness.

The Gospel, wherever it comes, brings forth fruit, [Colossians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.6); and all who receive it aright become "fat and flourishing," "being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God, [Philippians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.11). For every season in the year they have appropriate fruit [Ezekiel 47:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 47.12); and even to "old age," when other trees decay, these retain their vigor and fertility.

There may, indeed, be a difference in the fruits produced by them at the different periods of life; that of youth being more beauteous to the eye; and that of old age, more pleasant to the taste, as savoring less of crudity, and as being more richly flavored through the influence of many ripening suns.

"The fruits of the Spirit," indeed, are seen in both, [Galatians 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22-23); but in one, the fruit of activity and zeal; and in the other, a patient waiting for the coming of their Lord, [1 Corinthians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.7). To the last hour of their existence they shall bring forth fruit unto God, [Hosea 14:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.5-7), and God shall be "glorified in them, [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3)." Never shall their leaf wither or their fruit fail, until they are transplanted to the Paradise above!

The confidence with which David announces to the righteous their privileges, will lead us to consider,

II. Their security for the enjoyment of their privileges.

God has solemnly engaged to confer these blessings upon them.

From all eternity did he enter into covenant with his dear Son, that "if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he would see a seed, who should prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." The terms being accepted by the Lord Jesus, a people were "given to him;" with an assurance that not one of them should ever be lost, [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2); [John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6); [John 17:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.9-12); [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24). Accordingly, we find innumerable promises made to them, that "God will keep their feet, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9)," and carry on his work in their hearts, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6), and "preserve them blameless unto his heavenly kingdom, [1 Corinthians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.8). [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)."

From respect to these engagements, he will assuredly fulfill his Word.

Not one jot or tittle of his Word shall fail [Isaiah 54:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.9-10). His children may, indeed, by their transgressions, call forth some tokens of his displeasure; yet, though he visits their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from them, nor allow his faithfulness to fail. His covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips; for once he has sworn by his holiness, that he will not lie unto David, [Psalm 89:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-35). Having thus pledged his truth and faithfulness in their behalf, [1 Thessalonians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.24), and engaged never to leave them until he has accomplished in them and for them all that he has promised, [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6), he considers his own honor as involved in their happiness, [Ezekiel 39:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 39.25); and would account himself "unrighteous," if he left so much as one of them to perish! [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10). But "he cannot lie, [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2);" and, therefore, all who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them, may have the most abundant consolation, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)," in an assured expectation that "he will perfect that which concerns them, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8)," and "keep them, by his own power, unto everlasting salvation! [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)."

As comforting as this Scripture is, it needs to be very carefully guarded from abuse. Permit me, then, to address myself,

1. To those who are indulging in undue and carnal security.

Is there anyone that will dare to say, 'I cannot fall; or, if I fall, I cannot but rise again; for, if God were to leave me to perish, he would be unfaithful and unjust?'

I must reply to such a one, 'You are on the very border and precipice of Hell!' Who are you, that you should not fall, when David, and Solomon, and Peter fell? Or, who are you, that you must be raised again—when Demas, as far as we know, fell forever?

Have you been up to Heaven, and seen your name written in the Book of Life?

Have you inspected that covenant which was made between the Father and the Son, and seen that you were among the number of those who were given to Christ before the foundation of the world? "The Lord knows those who are his;" but who besides him possesses that knowledge? What do you know, except as far as causes can be discerned by their effects? You have experienced what appears to be a work of grace in your soul. Be thankful; but be not over confident. Thousands have deceived themselves; and you may have done the same.

Could it be infallibly ascertained that you were given to Christ before the foundation of the world, and, in consequence of God's engagement with him, were effectually called to a state of union with him—then we will acknowledge that none should ever pluck you out of the Father's hands, [John 10:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.27-29); for "his gifts and calling are without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)." But, as this can never be ascertained but by a special revelation from God, I must say to you, and would say, if you were the most eminent Christian upon earth, "Do not be high-minded, but fear, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20)." It is certain that multitudes of most distinguished professors have apostatized from their faith; and such may be your end; yes, and will, if your confidence be so daring and presumptuous; and, if this should be your unhappy fate, we shall not for one moment question the fidelity of God; but shall say of you, as John did of the apostates in his day, "They went out from us; but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us, [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.19)."

2. To those who have actually backslidden from God.

Are there none of this character among us? Would to God there were not! But look back, I beg you, and see whether it is still with you as it was in "the day of your espousals, [Jeremiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.2)." Have none of you "left your first love, [Revelation 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4)."

Time was, perhaps, when the concerns of your souls were of such importance in your eyes, that you thought you could never do enough to promote their eternal interests. The Word of God and prayer were then, as it were, your daily food; you walked with God all the day long. To maintain communion with him was your highest delight; you dreaded everything that might draw you from him; your bodies and souls were, like living sacrifices, offered to him daily upon his altar.

But how is it with you now? Perhaps at this time any formal service will suffice to satisfy the conscience; the duties of the closet are become irksome to you; the world has regained an ascendant over your minds; and evil tempers, which once appeared subdued and mortified, display themselves on every occasion, to the destruction of your own peace, and to the annoyance of all around you.

Ah! think what dishonor you do to God, and what cause of triumph you give to his enemies. Through your misconduct, "the way of truth is evil spoken of," and "the very name of God is blasphemed." But His word is true, whether men stumble over it or not; and, whatever a profane world may imagine, "He is a Rock; and there is no unrighteousness in him."

But do not delude yourselves with notions about electing love, or God's faithfulness to his promises. The only promises in which you have any part, are those which are made to weeping penitents, "Repent, then, without delay, and do your first works, [Revelation 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.5);" else "you shall be filled with your own ways, [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.14)," and reap forever the bitter fruit of your own devices, [Proverbs 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.31); [Proverbs 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.8).

2. To those who are holding on in the narrow way.

You are living witnesses for God, that he is both merciful and "upright." You know why it is that you have been preserved. You know that you would have fallen, even as others, if he had not upheld you in his everlasting arms! Give Him the glory, then; and cast yourselves altogether upon him. Beg of him to water your roots, and to make you "fruitful in every good work." Entreat him, not only "not to turn away from you, but to put his fear in your hearts, that you may never depart from him! [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)." So may you look forward to all the occurrences of life with a joyful hope, that you shall be preserved even to the end, and be "more than conquerors through Him who loved you, [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)."

The proper medium to be observed, is that between presumptuous hope and servile fear. A filial confidence is your high privilege; and you may go forward with joy, knowing in whom you have believed, that He is both able and willing to keep that which you have committed to him! [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)," and that he will be eternally glorified in the salvation of your souls!

#659

COMFORT IN GOD

**[Psalm 94:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.19)**

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, your comforts delight my soul."

To judge of the efficacy of Divine grace, we should see it in actual exercise, and under circumstances calculated to display its power. The writer of this Psalm, whoever he was, (for respecting the author or the occasion of it we have no certain information,) was sorely oppressed under the sanction and authority of legal enactments. But he committed his cause to God; and warned his oppressors that they should give an account of their conduct before another tribunal, where their atheistical impiety would receive its just recompense, verses 5-10, 20-23.

At the same time, he declared that he had heartfelt consolations, of which it was not in their power to deprive him; for that "in the multitude of his thoughts, which their cruelty excited within him, God's comforts delighted his soul."

In these words we see,

I. The fluctuations of mind to which the saints are exposed.

When men become saints, they still have the common sensibilities of men, and consequently are exposed to great fluctuations of mind:

1. In reference to their **temporal concerns**.

As members of society, they must be engaged in earthly occupations of some kind; and must depend, not on themselves only, but on others also, for their prosperity in the world. The misfortunes of others may involve them; and, without any fault of their own, they may be drawn into circumstances of most painful embarrassment. In such a predicament, it would ill befit them to be careless and unconcerned. They must of necessity have many thoughts, how to extricate themselves from their trouble, and to maintain their good character before men.

In a domestic relation, too, the saint cannot be insensible to the welfare of his wife and children; their health, their honor, their happiness, must of necessity occupy a deep interest in his mind, and be sources of much concern within him. Religion is not intended to destroy these feelings, but only to regulate them, and to render them subservient to his spiritual welfare.

2. In reference to the **concerns of their souls**.

The very intent of piety is, to make everything that relates to eternity interesting to the soul. Now the saint, in this present state of warfare, cannot always preserve the same state of sublime and spiritual affection; there will be seasons of comparative darkness and deadness, and seasons too of temptation, when Satan has gained some advantage over him.

Now, such ought to be seasons of deeper humiliation to the soul; and, together with contrition, there will often arise doubts and fears, which will fill the soul with most distressing perplexity. David himself sometimes had his fears, lest God should have cast him off forever, [Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-10); and similar apprehensions are experienced by the Lord's people, in every age and in every place.

But in the example before us we see,

II. The consolations which God administers to them in their troubles.

Truly they have comforts which the world knows nothing of:

1. They have for their refreshment and delight, the **comforts of God's Word**.

The Scriptures are a "well of salvation, from whence they draw water with joy." In them they behold the character of God, exhibited as it were at full length, in all the dispensations of his providence and grace.

There they see how God has dealt with his people in every age, ordering everything according to the counsels of his unerring wisdom, and overruling everything for their eternal good.

There they behold him as a refiner, regulating the furnace into which he puts his vessels; and watching the process, in order to bring them forth in due season, fit for the master's use!

There they see the "covenant ordered in all things and sure [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)."

There they find promises without number, exactly suited to their state. These are as marrow and fatness to their souls; and, nourished by these, they not only bear with patience, but glory and exult in all their trials. Encouraged by these promises, they are content to go into the furnace, assured that they shall come forth, at last, purified as gold.

2. They have for their refreshment and delight, the comforts of the Spirit.

Afflictions are seasons when God for the most part manifests himself to the souls of his people. The Son of man then walks most visibly with them, when they are put into the furnace for his sake. In the mount of difficulty and trial, he will be seen. In his people's extremity he grants to them his richest communications, imparting to them his Holy Spirit, as a Comforter, to witness their adoption into his family, and to seal them unto the day of redemption. Yes, so abundantly does he sometimes "shed abroad his love in their hearts," that they are fearful of losing their trials, lest they should lose at the same time their consolations also.

Such were the comforts administered to the Apostle Paul, [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5); and such shall be the portion of all who take the Lord for their God.

Application:

1. How highly the saint is favored above all other people upon earth!

What source of comfort can the worldling find in his trials? The whole creation is to him but "a broken cistern that can hold no water." It is the saint alone that has a never-failing source of joy and bliss!

2. How desirable it is to acquaint ourselves with God!

It is in God, as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, that this blessedness is to be found. To those who seek him not in Christ Jesus, God himself is only "a consuming fire;" but to his believing people he is "a very present help," and "an eternal great reward!"

#660

DEVOTION TO GOD RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED

**[Psalm 95:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 95.6-11)**

"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

In the former part of this Psalm, the Jewish people, for whom it was composed, mutually exhorted each other; in the latter part, God himself is the speaker; and the manner in which this latter part is cited in the Epistle to the Hebrews, shows that the whole Psalm is as proper for the use of the Christian, as it was of the Jewish, Church.

The peculiar circumstance of its consisting of a mutual exhortation is there expressly noticed; and noticed with particular approbation, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called Today! [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13)." This hint, the compilers of our Liturgy attended to, when they appointed this Psalm to be read constantly in the Morning Service, as introductory to the other Psalms that should come in rotation; and, as being so appointed, it des3erves from us a more than ordinary attention.

In discoursing upon it, we shall notice:

I. The exhortation.

The proper object of our worship is here described. As addressed to the Jews, the terms here used would fix their attention on Jehovah, as contra-distinguished from all false gods; but, as addressed to Christians, they lead our minds to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "God with us," even "God over all, blessed for evermore!"

He is our Maker; for "by him were all things created, both which are in Heaven and in earth, [John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.3)." He is "the good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep," and who watches over them, and preserves them day and night, [John 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.11). [Hebrews 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20). [Ezekiel 34:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.11-16). Him then we must worship with all humility of mind, "bowing down, and kneeling before him." At his hands must we seek for mercy, even through his sin-atoning sacrifice; and from him, as our living Head, must we look for all necessary supplies of grace and peace.

O come, let us thus approach him! Let us do it not merely in the public services of our Church, but in our secret chambers; and not occasionally only, but constantly; having all our dependence upon him, and all our expectations from him.

That this exhortation may not be in vain, we entreat you to consider,

II. The warning with which it is enforced.

The Jews who, in the wilderness, disobeyed the heavenly call, were never allowed to enter into the land of Canaan. In the judgments inflicted upon them, they are held forth as a warning to us, [1 Corinthians 10:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-11).

Like them, we have seen all the wonders of God's love, in delivering us from a far greater than Egyptian bondage.

Like them, we have had spiritual food administered to us in rich abundance in the Gospel of Christ.

And if, like them, we harden our hearts, and rebel against our God—like them, we must be excluded from the heavenly Canaan. They by their obstinacy provoked God to exclude them with an oath. O that we may never provoke him to "swear that we also shall never enter into his rest!"

That we are in danger of bringing this awful judgment on ourselves is evident from the intimation given us by the Apostle Jude, verse 5, and yet more plainly from the warnings which Paul founds on this very passage, [Hebrews 3:7-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-19); [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1). Let us then "hear the voice" of our good Shepherd, before it is too late. Let us "grieve him" no longer; but let us turn to him with our whole hearts. Caleb and Joshua were admitted into Canaan, because "they followed the Lord fully;" let us follow him fully, and we shall certainly attain the promised rest.

After the example of Paul, we would caution you with all earnestness against:

1. Unbelief.

The Jews believed neither the promises nor the threatenings of God, and therefore they perished! Let us beware lest we fall after the same example of unbelief! [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12). If we will not believe that we stand in need of mercy to the extent that God has declared, or that the service of God is so reasonable and blessed as he has represented it to be, or that the judgments of God shall infallibly come on all who refuse to serve him—then there is no hope; we must perish, notwithstanding all the offers of mercy that are sent to us; for "the Word preached cannot profit us, if it is not mixed with faith in those who hear it, [Hebrews 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.2)."

2. Hardness of heart.

As Israel hardened themselves against God when his messages were sent them by Moses, so do many now harden themselves against the Word preached by the ministers of Christ. They "puff at" all the judgments denounced against them, [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-5). But "who ever hardened himself against God, and prospered?" O! "will your hearts be stout in the day that he shall deal with you? Can you thunder with a voice like his?" Be persuaded; humble yourselves before him, yes, "bow down and kneel before him," and never cease to cry for mercy, until he has turned away his anger, and spoken peace to your souls!

3. Delay.

"Today," says the Psalmist.

"Today, while it is called Today," says Paul.

"Today," I would say. Yes, brethren, "today" "harden not your hearts;" for you know not what a day may bring forth. Before another day, you may be taken into the eternal world; or, if not, you may provoke God to swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest; and then your remaining days will answer no other end, than to fill up the measure of your iniquities!

But surely you have grieved him long enough already; some of you twenty, some thirty, some perhaps even "forty years." Let there be an end of this rebellion against your Maker and your Redeemer; and let this day, which is with him the day of grace, be to you "the day of salvation."

#661

THE DUTY OF MAKING CHRIST KNOWN TO THE HEATHEN

**[Psalm 96:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 96.1-3)**

"Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples!"

To anyone who looks even in the most superficial manner into the Holy Scriptures, there must appear a very wide difference between the experience of the saints recorded there, and that which is found among people reputed saints in the present day. The Savior himself is not so much the object of holy glorying, as he was among some, who looked forward to him at the distance of a thousand years. Nor are the same elevated affections towards him brought into exercise, as were displayed by them. A man who should now exclaim, as David did, "Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples!" He, I say, would be accounted an enthusiast at least; and it would be well if he were not characterized by a yet harsher term.

But religion is, or ought to be, the same in all ages; except indeed that our views of Christ should be more elevated, and our delight in him be more ardent, in proportion as our means of knowing him are more ample, and our motives to love him are more enlarged.

The Psalm before us undoubtedly refers to Jesus; for it speaks expressly of the publication of his Gospel to the Gentile world. It is indeed only a part of a Psalm written originally by David at the time of his bringing up the ark to Mount Zion from the house of Obed-edom, 1 Chronicles 16:7-36; and this part was selected afterwards for the constant use of the Church, as being calculated to keep up in the minds of men an expectation of the Messiah, and to prepare their hearts for the reception of him.

In discoursing on that portion of it which we have read, we shall,

I. Point out your duty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In speaking to people who profess to derive all their hopes of salvation from the Lord Jesus, methinks it is scarcely necessary to say that:

1. We should praise him ourselves.

We should not be content merely to acknowledge him in words; we should feel towards him in deed, as our "All in all! [1 John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18)." These feelings we should express in songs of praise; or if we are silent as to our voice, we should at least "make melody to him in our hearts;" "blessing" and adoring him from our inmost souls!

We should sing to him "a new song." It was so called by David, because it was a song that was to be sung especially at the introduction of the Christian dispensation, the events predicted and shadowed forth being then fulfilled. But it is still a new song to all who sing it; because in their unconverted state they have no disposition, no ability to sing it, "they cannot, in that sense, say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.3)." Moreover, it will to all eternity continue new; fresh discoveries of his glory being ever manifested to the soul, and fresh energies supplied for the celebration of his praise. Hence in Heaven itself, the songs of all the glorified saints are thus designated, "they sing unto the Lord a new song! [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9); [Revelation 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.3)." Thus "from day to day" our harps should be tuned afresh, and our praises ascend to Heaven with every breath we draw.

2. We should make him known to others.

Who that had ever tasted of the blessings of salvation would "eat his morsel alone?" Who would not wish all the world to partake with him? Yes surely, we should declare his glory among the heathen, and his wonders among all people."

O what "wonders" of love and mercy have we to proclaim! Who can reflect on the person of our "Emmanuel, who is God with us," leaving the bosom of his Father, taking our nature, bearing our sins, and effecting by his obedience unto death our reconciliation with God. Who, I say, can reflect on this, and not desire to make it known to all the sinners of mankind? In a word, who can have beheld "the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ," and not desire to reflect the light of it on all who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death? This is undoubtedly our duty; we are not to put our light under a basket, but to set it on a lampstand that all the world, if possible, may see the light.

This then being our duty to the Lord Jesus Christ, we will proceed to,

II. Call you to the performance of it.

1. Consider your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How inconceivably great are our obligations to the Lord Jesus! If we attempt to estimate them, where shall we begin? Or, having begun, where shall we end? If you have not yet experienced his converting grace, the very provision of a salvation for you, a salvation so dearly bought, and so freely offered, demands from you every tribute of love and gratitude that you can ever pay.

But if you have reason to think yourselves partakers of this salvation, and are enabled with appropriating faith to say, "He has loved me, and given himself for me!" then there should be no bounds to your zeal and diligence in his service. Time, talents, property, yes life itself, should be esteemed by you as of no value, any farther than they may enable you to glorify his name.

Enter then minutely into the consideration of this subject, and say, Whether, "if you hold your peace, the very stones will not cry out against you?"

2. Consider the necessities of the heathen world.

The whole Scriptures speak of the heathen as perishing for lack of knowledge; and are under a sentence of guilt and condemnation!

Can we then know the remedy which God has provided for them, and not feel ourselves bound to reveal it to them, and to labor, as far as possible, to extend to them its saving benefits?

Can we reflect on the unhappy state of the Jews, and not pity them; blinded as they are by prejudice, and bent as they are on their own destruction?

Can we look on all the different classes of the Gentile world, and see what penances they endure to pacify the supposed wrath of their senseless idols, and not feel a desire to proclaim to them the glad tidings of the Gospel?

If it would be our duty to stretch out our hand to one sinking in the waters, and to rescue him from perishing, much more is it our duty to exert ourselves to the utmost of our power for the preservation of a ruined world.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are lukewarm in the cause of Christ.

Many are so afraid of being accuaed of wild enthusiasm, that they banish from their minds all that may subject them to such an imputation. Hence, while they are correct and accurate in their principles, they are grievously defective in the sublimer parts of practical religion. They have a form of godliness, but no experience of its power. But let such people know that the Lord Jesus Christ is more displeased with the lukewarmness of those who profess themselves to be his friends, than he is with the neglect of his avowed enemies! [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16). If from our inmost souls we love him not, he denounces a solemn curse against us, [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22); and if we serve him not with the talents entrusted to our care, he will require them at our hands, and punish us severely for our abuse of them! [Matthew 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.20).

2. Those who are active in his service.

God forbid that we should ever speak a word to discourage activity in the service of our Lord. But it is certain that many are diligent in doing what they suppose to be his will, who yet are far from cultivating that spirit which he will approve. Pride, ostentation, and a variety of other corrupt motives—may stimulate men to exertion; while humility and modesty, and all the lovelier graces of the Spirit, are lacking in them. See to it then, that your love and zeal be duly tempered with humility and godly fear. At the same time, take care that you do not become weary in well-doing. Be on your guard that your love to the Savior languish not, and that your endeavors to convert others to the knowledge of him be not relaxed.

Try among your family, friends and neighbors to interest them in his salvation. Then extend your efforts to all, whether Jews or Gentiles; and "count not even life itself dear to you," if that you may but glorify him, and save the souls of your perishing fellow-creatures!

#662

Worship in the Beauty of Holiness

**[Psalm 96:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 96.9)**

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!"

The calling of the Gentiles was a very favorite subject with the sweet singer of Israel. It is almost always blended with his sweetest strains. If at any time his soul is inflamed with more than ordinary devotion, it expands itself immediately to the remotest corners of the earth, and anticipates the period when the whole world shall enjoy the privileges which were then confined within the narrow limits of the Jewish nation. Yes rather, when the richer blessings of Messiah's reign should be diffused with equal liberality over the face of the whole earth.

The Psalm before us had a special reference to the Messiah. It speaks of "a new song" that was to be sung; a song unknown to Moses, who celebrated only a temporal deliverance; and it was to be sung by "the whole earth," because it was to be commemorative of a spiritual and eternal redemption, wrought out by the Messiah for man.

Let us read a part of this sublime composition, "O sing unto the Lord a new song! sing unto the Lord all the whole earth. Sing unto the Lord; bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the Heathen, his wonders among all people. Give unto the Lord, O kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! fear before him, all the earth. Say among the Heathen that the Lord reigns! verses 1-3, 7, 9, 10." That it is of the Messiah's advent and reign that he here speaks, is evident; because he refers, not to anything past, but to events yet future, "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; let the field be joyful, and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the forest rejoice before the Lord; for He comes; for he comes to judge (to rule) the earth; he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth! verses 11-13."

This Psalm, together with a part of the 105th, was used by David, when he carried up the ark to Mount Zion, to place it in the Tabernacle, 1 Chronicles 16:7-33; and well was it adapted to that occasion; because the ark was a very eminent type of that adorable "Word, who in due time became flesh, and dwelt among us, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)." Then, even at the hour when we might have supposed that the interests of his own subjects would have an exclusive possession of his mind, did David contemplate the welfare of the Gentiles, and call on them to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, [1 Chronicles 16:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 16.29)."

We shall consider these words as containing:

I. An invitation to the whole Gentile world.

By "the beauty of holiness," I understand the Sanctuary of the Lord.

As the tabernacle and all its furniture were of the most costly materials and the most exquisite workmanship, so was the temple and all that it contained; and especially everything connected with the holy of holies. But though in this respect it exceeded everything upon earth in "beauty," there was a far higher reason for its being called by this peculiar name; it was the immediate residence of God, who dwelt there in a bright cloud, the Shechinah, the visible symbol of his presence. The Heaven of heavens was not more holy than that sacred chamber, nor more beauteous; and therefore it might well be called, not beautiful, but "beauty;" not holy, but "holiness" in the abstract, or more forcibly still, "The beauty of holiness," in comparison with which there was nothing beautiful or holy upon the face of the whole earth.

There David invites the whole Gentile world to come, and "worship the Lord," the Creator, the Governor, the Savior of the world.

By the Law of Moses, it was forbidden them to enter into any part of the sanctuary. For them an outer court was provided, beyond which they were forbidden, on pain of death, to proceed. But, through the coming of the Messiah, "the partition-wall was to be broken down;" and all, both Jews and Gentiles, were to be incorporated into one body, and to be made partakers of the same privileges, [Ephesians 2:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.14-16). Even the veil of the temple itself was to be rent in twain, [Matthew 27:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.51), and "a new and living way be opened" for every man, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22), to approach for himself the very mercy-seat of the Most High, and to offer there his sacrifices of prayer and praise, and his incense of fervent intercession.

To this does David here invite the Gentile world. Not David himself would have dared to enter into the sanctuary which was then standing; into "the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High" it would have been at the peril of his life to enter; but he foresaw, that that servile dispensation was in due time to pass away; and that God would then hold out to every man, whether Jew or Gentile, whether bond or free, the golden scepter of his grace, with free permission to make known to him his every request, even to the half, or to the whole, of his kingdom. To the Gentiles therefore he calls, to "turn from their idols to serve the living God," and to "glorify God with their bodies and their spirits, which are his."

Let us next consider the words as,

II. A special call to us.

"The beauty of holiness" is yet standing.

The tabernacle and the temple are indeed long since swept away; nor is there in existence a vessel that belonged to either. But, if the symbol of God's presence is removed, is God himself therefore gone? No; he is here, in this very place, as truly as ever he was in his sanctuary of old. He has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

And have we not also a sacrifice with which we may approach him? Yes, we have a sacrifice of infinitely greater value than all the cattle on a thousand hills. "The sacrifice of his dear Son is to him of a sweet-smelling savor;" and the merit of that, every one of us may plead, and plead too with an infallible certainty of acceptance.

What was there in the temple of old which we do not possess? Not anything; not anything which we do not possess to infinitely greater advantage. The Jews had the shadow; we have the substance; and what we enjoy as far excels in beauty and in holiness all that they possessed, as a living body excels a reflection of it in a looking-glass.

Let me, then, call you, as David does, to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness".

"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering; come into his courts, verse 8;" and take care that your worship be such as befits his sanctuary. Let a holy reverential awe fill your souls, whenever you draw near to God. Let your confessions be humble; your supplications, fervent; your thanksgivings, devout. Have a special view to the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the whole of the service; and do not think to offer anything to God, or to receive anything from God, but through him, as your all-prevailing Friend and Mediator.

Whether you approach God in your closet, or in the public assembly, watch over your spirit in relation to these things, and presume not to offer unto God the sacrifice of fools. Do not let the consideration of your natural distance from God discourage you.

Remember that the invitation is given to the remotest Gentiles, who are bowing down to the works of their own hands, which can never profit or deliver. To you, therefore, whatever your state is, is the invitation sent; and we are authorised, by God himself, to declare, that of those who come to him in his Son's name, "not so much as one shall ever be cast out."

ADDRESS.

1. Make a due improvement of your own privileges.

You cannot but see how highly David and his people were privileged above the benighted heathen; yet were their blessings but a faint shadow of yours; so much more distinct is your knowledge of God, and so much nearer is your access to him. Not any but the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies; and he only on one day in the year. But of you, every individual may go to the very throne of the Divine Majesty, and that too every day and every hour of your lives. You are "a kingdom of priests," and may take the blood of your great sacrifice, and sprinkle it with acceptance on the Mercy-seat of your God. O that you might learn to estimate aright your high privilege, and improve it daily to the everlasting benefit of your souls!

2. Endeavor to extend these privileges to the whole world.

We should not be content to serve our God alone; we should wish him to be honored and enjoyed by every man; and to advance his glory in the world should be an object of our most unwearied attention. Happily for us, there are Societies that have embarked in this blessed work, and through which every individual may contribute to the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom. And view the field, how extended it is! "The field is the world." Arise, my brethren, to the work that is before you; and if you cannot effect all that you could wish, let it at least be said of you by the heart-searching God, "They have done what they could!"

#663

GOD'S WAYS DARK, BUT JUST

**[Psalm 97:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.2)**

"Clouds and thick darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne!"

The reign of Christ is here spoken of, as a ground of joy to the whole world, "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the distant shores be glad." That Christ is the person to whom the Psalm refers, we are assured on infallible authority; for, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are told that the injunction, "Let all God's angels worship him!" was given by the Father in reference to him, "When He (the Father) brings in the First-begotten into the world, he says, And let all the angels of God worship him. Compare verse 7 with [Hebrews 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.6)."

As to the particular advent of our Lord, I conceive that, in the Psalm before us, the period alluded to is that in which our Lord came to conduct the Hebrew nation through the wilderness to the Promised Land. "He came down with thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud," in exact accordance with the description given of him in this Psalm. Compare verses 2-5 with [Exodus 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.11); [Exodus 19:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.16).

At the precise period of his incarnation there were no such signs; though at his death and resurrection, which may properly be included in that period, there were similar demonstrations of his Divine Majesty; and at his future advent we are assured he will "come in power and great glory," such as that with which he was attended at the time of his ascension to the right hand of God, [Acts 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.11) with [Luke 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.27). But it is not to any one of these periods that I shall confine my attention; because the language of my text is general, and may well be considered as referring to all periods and to all events; for there is no one part of the divine government to which it may not be well applied, every act of it being involved in impenetrable obscurity—yet founded in wisdom, and goodness, and truth, and equity.

In unfolding, then, the truth contained in my text, I will endeavor to illustrate it:

I. Inscrutable depths will be found in the dispensations of God's **providence**.

Survey the state of the whole world since the fall of man.

See the state in which every child is born into the world; how "shaped in iniquity," how altogether unlike to man in his original creation, [Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.5). [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3). See also, as they grow up to maturity and put forth their powers, what wickedness they commit, and what misery they spread around them—none being a greater enemy to man than man himself!

Behold the brute creation; these, though incapable of sin, feel bitterly its penal consequences; and show, beyond a possibility of doubt, that they inherit qualities which they did not originally possess; being hostile to each other, and in many instances the common enemies of man.

The very earth itself also partakes of the curse due to sin; and all the elements are armed against the human race, to inflict on them, as God shall appoint, the destruction they have merited.

I ask then: Are not "clouds and thick darkness round about that God by whose ordinance these things exist? Can anyone give a satisfactory explanation of them all, or even of any one of them? Yet we are sure that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation (the basis) of them all." For whether we understand his ways or not, "his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he, [Deuteronomy 32:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.4)."

Mark also his dealings with individual men.

What an amazing disparity do we find among men!

Some are endued with great mental powers; while others, from their very birth, through a lack of intellectual capacity, are in a state more helpless and degraded than the beasts themselves.

Some possess all the comforts of health; and others protracting a miserable existence, from which, at any moment, death would be a merciful relief!

Some are destitute of the most common necessities of life; while others revel in every species of luxurious abundance!

To what can we trace this vast diversity for, if we attempt to account for it on the common principles of equity, what shall we say? Surely "clouds and darkness are round about it" all; and faith is left to supply the deficiencies of reason. We know that God cannot err, and that "all his ways are both mercy and truth." His "way, indeed, is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known, [Psalm 77:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.19); but "his righteousness is like the great mountains, though his judgments are a great deep, [Psalm 36:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.6)."

II. Inscrutable depths are also found in the method of God's grace in salvation.

Here the difficulties are greater still. Consider,

1. The revelation itself.

What a mystery is here! The substitution of God's coequal, co-eternal Son, in the place of his own sinful and rebellious creatures!" The Holy and the Just One , in the place of the unholy and unjust! [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18). Or rather, if I might venture to use such an expression, I would almost say, The death of the incarnate God—in the place and for the sake of incarnate devils! You remember what our blessed Lord himself said, even to those who called themselves the Lord's people, "You are of your father the devil; and the lusts of your father you will do! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)." Yet for such did Jesus die, even for the chief of sinners. Tell me, Are there not "clouds and darkness" here? Yet I hesitate not to say, that "righteousness" pervades it all; and "judgment," such as shall finally approve itself to the whole intelligent creation, is the basis of it.

In fact, it is this which, above all other things in the whole universe, displays the righteousness of God, who, by exacting such a sacrifice, then most of all shows himself just, when he justifies those who believe in his dear Son! [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26).

2. The objects selected to enjoy its benefits.

The great mass of mankind, from the Deluge to the time of Abraham, were left in darkness, insomuch that the knowledge of the true God had nearly vanished from the earth. And then was God pleased to fix on Abraham, an idolater in the midst of an idolatrous family and nation, and to reveal his covenant to him. To Isaac also, in preference to Ishmael his elder child; and to Jacob also, in preference to Esau—was it given to be comprehended in this covenant; yes, given while both of them were yet in the womb, and consequently before they had done either good or evil. Let anyone explain this, or account for it in any other way than that suggested by our Lord, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight!"

God's sovereignty in salvation is apparent throughout history, and in our times as well, in choosing the poor, the weak, the vile—in preference, for the most part, to the rich, the great, the moral. For it is found, in ten thousand instances, that "publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom before the subtle and self-righteous Pharisees." The man who sees no mystery here, only betrays his own ignorance and stupidity. A man with ever so contracted a view of this subject, must of necessity exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

3. The trials to which the elect are subjected, in their way to Heaven.

One would suppose that God's chosen people should be freed from:  
the persecutions of men,  
the assaults of devils,  
the temptations of sin, and  
from all which might endanger their salvation;  
but God sees fit to give both to men and devils a kind of licence to assault his redeemed people; as it is said, "You wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places! [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12)."

One would suppose that those whom he has redeemed with the blood of his only dear Son, should be free from these things; but, on the contrary, he says, "If you are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you illegitimate, and not sons."

One would suppose at least, that from their conversion to God they should be freed from the corruptions of their nature and the power of the evil principle within them.

But far different are his dealings with his redeemed people; and through much tribulation he brings every one of them to glory.

In all these things he is "both wise and good;" and, however intricate or circuitous the way may be whereby he leads his people to glory, it will be found at last to have been "the right way! [Psalm 107:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.7);" the right way for their benefit, and the right way also for the honor of his own great name.

III. Let us yet further contemplate the inscrutableness of God's ways, in the final outcome of all things.

How tremendous will be the difference between the states of different men!

View Heaven and all its glory, and Hell with all its misery; and consider that both the one and the other will be eternal; and then consider how short the period of time is in which any man is preparing for the one or the other of these states; and how small the distance between their real characters, if estimated by the common standard of the world. Above all, contemplate the rich youth, who thought he had fulfilled the whole Law from his earliest youth, cast out; and the dying thief, who spent his whole life, even to his last hour in sin, exalted to glory!

Is there nothing mysterious in this?

Truly, we must acknowledge that these things are utterly pass all human comprehension. We are sure that "the Judge of all will do right," and that the day of judgment is especially appointed "for the revelation of the righteous judgment of God! [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5);" but we must wait until he shall be pleased to throw the true light upon his own mysterious ways, and to take the veil from our hearts, that we may be able to comprehend them.

Surely from this subject we may **learn**:

1. Submission.

Your trials, I will suppose, are great. But are they greater than your desert of punishment? Or do you know all the gracious designs which God has to accomplish by them? "Be still, then, and know that he is God;" and, under the most grievous affliction that can come upon you, learn to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him."

2. Gratitude.

Look back upon the ways of God; and, however you may have been disposed at the time to say, "All these things are against me!" say whether you have not found that he has brought good out of evil, and given you reason to acknowledge, that his judgments were mercies in disguise? Were you left to yourselves, you would choose nothing but what should be pleasing to flesh and blood; but God consults your best interests, and deals with you, not according to your wishes, but according to your necessities.

Be thankful then to him, for having acted towards you as a wise and loving parent, who has withheld nothing that was good for you; and if at any time he has inflicted chastisement upon you, he "has done it for your profit, that you might be partaken of his holiness," and be rendered fit for his glory.

3. Trust.

You know not what is before you; but you know that you are in God's hands, and that "not a hair can fall from your head" but by his special appointment. Look then to him, to order everything for you; and if you understand not his dealings with you, be content to say, 'What I know not now, I shall know hereafter.' Never for a moment doubt his power or grace. He has promised to "make all things work together for your good;" and therefore, under the darkest dispensation, assure yourselves that "He is doing all things well;" and determine, through grace, to say with Job, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him!"

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)

#664

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

**[Psalm 97:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.11)**

"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness far the upright in heart."

This Psalm, whatever was the particular occasion on which it was written, undoubtedly refers to the kingdom of the Messiah, in which the whole creation has abundant reason to rejoice, verse 1. To him it is expressly applied in the Epistle to the Hebrews, even to his incarnation, "When Jehovah brings in the First-begotten into the world, he says: And let all the angels of God worship him! Compare verse 7 with [Hebrews 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.6)."

But it is not to rejoice in him merely that the saints are called; they are to love him, to serve him, to honor him, to trust in him, and to expect at his hands the blessedness which he himself, in his exalted state, enjoys.

He suffered indeed before he entered into his glory; and so likewise must they; but, for their consolation under their sufferings, let them know that joy is treasured up for them; for "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;" and, if only they maintain their integrity, they shall assuredly reap their reward.

In discoursing on these words, I shall open to you:

I. Genuine uprightness of heart **described**.

Instead of entering into a general description of "the righteous," I shall take that particular representation here given of them, "the upright in heart;" for this is peculiar to the righteous, and to them alone; and at the same time there is not a righteous person in the universe whom it does not accurately depict.

Now, uprightness of heart necessarily includes:

1. A MIND open to the reception of truth.

The mind of a natural man is closed against divine truth; he hates the light, and will not come to it; and if it is imposed upon him, he shuts his eyes against it, lest it should reveal to him his corruptions!

But a man who is upright in heart will come to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest. He desires to know the whole mind of God; and is as thankful for the light which opens to him his sins, as for that which brings to his view the wondrous Savior. He is conscious that there is a film upon his eyes; but he begs of God to remove it. He is sensible that, through the weakness of his vision, the very light itself will blind him; and therefore he entreats of God to send his Holy Spirit into his soul, to "open the eyes of his understanding," and to "guide him into all truth." While "his eye was evil, he was in total darkness;" but having attained "a single eye, his whole body is full of light, [Matthew 6:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22-23)."

2. A WILL determined to follow the truth as far as it is discovered.

He complains of no doctrine as "an hard saying," nor of any "commandment as grievous." When he goes to the Lord for instruction, he says with Paul, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" 'Only declare to me your blessed will, and I am ready, and determined, through grace, to execute it.' As to consequences, he will not regard them. "What is duty?" will be his only inquiry. He will expect to have his conduct disapproved by an ignorant ungodly world; but "he confers not with flesh and blood." It is a settled principle in his mind, "If I please men, I cannot be a servant of Jesus Christ! [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)." He will give his whole soul to God, to "be poured into the mold of the Gospel," and to be employed in "magnifying the Lord, whether by life or death, [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20)."

3. A CONSCIENCE faithfully inspecting the whole conduct, and bringing it to the test of God's Word.

Conscience in the natural man is partial. Indeed, in multitudes who profess religion, it is far from being a faithful monitor. Conscience will deny in practice what it admits in principle, and allow in ourselves what it condemns in others.

But where the heart is truly upright, conscience will act, not according to any selfish views or principles, but with strict equity, according to the unerring standard of the Gospel. This is essential to real integrity; and, when God has "put truth in our inward parts," and "renewed a right spirit within us," such will assuredly be the effects: conscience will be a light within us; it will be like a compass, that will guide us in the darkest night; it will be God's viceregent in the soul, acquitting or condemning according to truth, even as God himself will do in the day of judgment. It will summon the whole man to give account of himself from day to day; it will cause all the actions, words, and thoughts to pass in review before it. In short, a good conscience will allow no disposition, no habit, no inclination, to exist in the soul—without comparing it with the written word, and having reason to believe that it will be approved of the Lord.

4. A LIFE in habitual accordance with these principles.

After all, "the tree must be known by its fruit." We can know nothing with certainty respecting the heart, but by the life. God sees it as it is in itself; we can discover it only by its acts.

Behold then the upright man in his daily walk.

See him searching with all humility the Word of truth, and imploring direction from God, that he may understand it aright.

Behold him giving up himself, in body and soul, to the Lord from day to day; and rising, above all earthly considerations, to the contemplation and execution of God's blessed will.

Behold his searchings of heart also, and holy fear lest any hidden abomination should lurk within him.

Hear him crying to God for his effectual aid, "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)."

Then compare with this, his temper, his spirit, his conduct; and then you will see, though surely with manifold imperfections, "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit."

Here is real uprightness of heart. Let us next contemplate,

II. The **blessedness** that awaits genuine uprightness of heart.

A person possessed of this character will have many afflictions to bear.

We greatly mistake if we think that such a person will be approved of all; or that he will have no trials within his own soul. No, indeed; he will, like Paul himself, have "fightings without and fears within." As much as such a character is admired in theory, it never is really exhibited before men without exciting great offence. From the days of Abel to the present moment, have "those who were born after the flesh hated and persecuted those who were born after the Spirit;" and for the most part has that been found true, that "the greatest foes have been those of a man's own household." If infallible wisdom, unbounded love, and sinless perfection could have obtained an exemption from the common lot, our blessed Lord would have passed without offence; but He, who was the most perfect of the human race, was pursued with more bitter acrimony than any other from the foundation of the world; and if they so hated him, they will hate us also, "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will those of his household."

In his own soul, too, the saint feels much to humble and to try him. He still has a carnal principle within him, and is only renewed in part, "the flesh still lusts against the Spirit, so that he cannot do the things that he would." The Apostle Paul himself "groaned within himself, being burdened;" and, under a distressing sense of his indwelling corruptions, cried, "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?"

It may be, too, that he is assaulted with violent temptations, and that the fiery darts of Satan are permitted to pierce his soul. At such a season as this he may be ready to write bitter things against himself, and to call in question all that he has ever experienced of the grace of God.

But, whatever his trials may be, a happy outcome of them most assuredly awaits him.

"Light and gladness are sown for him;" and, though he may wait long for the harvest, "he shall surely reap, if he faints not."

There is in the purposes of God a harvest of happiness secured to him. The trials of Joseph appeared, for a season, to defeat all the expectations which his dreams had excited; but they led, all of them in succession, to the accomplishment of his predestined elevation.

Our blessed Lord, if viewed in the garden, on the cross, and in the grave, seemed to have been utterly defeated; but these were the forerunners of his glory. His resurrection soon changed the scene; his ascension speedily followed; and his sending of the Holy Spirit showed, that all which had been ordained respecting him was fulfilled, and that he was invested with all power to save a ruined world.

Thus shall God's purposes be accomplished in the final salvation of all his people. They may be tried, and sorely too, for a season; but they may adopt the language of the Church of old, under her deepest afflictions, and say, "Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness! [Micah 7:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.8-9)."

In the promises of God, also, is the same blessed issue secured. "If we suffer with Christ, God engages that we shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together." "The trial of our faith, from whatever quarter it may come, is precious; yes, more precious than gold itself; because it will be to our praise and honor and glory, as well as to the glory of our Lord and Savior, in the great day of his appearing, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7)."

Hear how fully our blessed Lord declared this to his weeping and disconsolate disciples, "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy! [John 16:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.20-22)." So our "weeping may endure for a night; but joy shall most assuredly come in the morning! [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5)."

But even in the very experience of the upright is there a pledge of future glory. His tears are the seed of joy; and, "as surely as he goes on his way, bearing this precious seed-basket, so surely shall he come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him." See this described, in its process, by Paul, "We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope makes not ashamed."

Here tribulation is the seed;  
patience is the blade;  
experience is the ear;  
hope is the full corn in the ear;  
and the completion of that hope is in Heaven, the ingathering of the harvest into the garner.

In truth, "the light and momentary afflictions of the righteous, actually work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"

Thus is every upright soul rendered conformable to his Divine Master. He first" drinks of the brook along the way, and then, like him, has the happiness to lift up his head [Psalm 110:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.7)."

ADDRESS.

1. Seek genuine **integrity**.

Integrity is universally held in high estimation; at least, men universally profess so to regard it; and therefore, waving at present all consideration of the peculiarities of religion, I say, seek an honest and an upright heart:

Let your minds be open to the reception of truth.

Let your wills be determined to embrace Scripture truth.

Let conscience act its part, and execute the office of a faithful monitor within you.

Let your lives be regulated altogether by its dictates.

Do not let prejudice or passion or self-interest blind you; let not the whole world cause you to swerve from the path of duty. Be bold for God; and "serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all your days." In a word, "Behave like men," and "be faithful unto death." Like Moses, be ready to suffer affliction with the people of God; and in due season you shall, like him, receive an ample recompense of reward!

2. Seek genuine **happiness**.

This also is an object of universal desire. But be sure to seek it in the way in which alone it can be found. If you "sow iniquity, you can reap nothing but vanity!" If you "sow the wind, you must reap the whirlwind!" God has determined, that "whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap; he who sows to the flesh, shall from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit, shall from the Spirit reap life everlasting! [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

It is the harvest which repays the gardener for all his labors. Look to that; and know, that "the sufferings of this present life, however great or numerous they may be, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!"

As for mere appearances of integrity, be not satisfied with them; they must end badly at the last. "Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since man was placed on the earth, that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment. Though his pride reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, he will perish forever, like his own dung! [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.4-7)." "Seek, then, the honor that comes from God," and the happiness that will endure. Then, when those who laughed now shall weep, you who wept now shall laugh and sing for joy to all eternity! [Luke 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.21); [Luke 6:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.25).

#665

CHRIST'S ADVENT A GROUND OF JOY

**[Psalm 98:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 98.1-9)**

"Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—shout for joy before the LORD, the King. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity!"

The Psalms are generally read as the effusions of a devout mind, while their reference to Christ is almost entirely overlooked. This, which is now under our consideration, like the 96th Psalm with which it accords, confessedly relates to Christ; the very language of verse 3, is used by Mary, Zachariah, and Simeon, in the divine hymns whereby they celebrated his advent in the flesh, [Luke 1:54-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.54-55); [Luke 1:72](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.72); [Luke 2:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.30-32). It contains,

I. Some grounds and matter for our joy.

In the three first verses the Psalmist describes our joy in figurative expressions. In the last verse he expressly specifies, the proper ground of our joy.

The incarnation of Christ seems to be the subject here referred to.

Christ is "the Lord" Jehovah, "the King" of kings, and Lord of lords, who "has come to judge the earth," and to exercise dominion, not, like the judges of Israel, over one nation only, but over all the nations of the world.

Nor under his government will any partiality be shown either to Jews or Gentiles; on the contrary, it is administered "with perfect righteousness and equity."

His laws are equally binding on the rich and poor.

His invitations are equally extended to the most abandoned sinner, and the most decent moralist.

His benefits are equally conferred on all, according to their attainments in holiness.

His judgments will be inflicted with equal severity on the proudest monarch and the lowest beggar.

With him is no respect of persons; and whatever difference he may put between one man and another in this life—he will manifest at last, that though clouds and darkness were round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne!

This is indeed a ground for the most exalted joy:

1. The incarnation of Christ is the most "marvelous" occurrence that ever the world beheld.

That God should be manifested in human flesh, in order to redeem his enemies from destruction, and to purchase to himself a people with his own blood! great indeed is this mystery of godliness; it has heights and depths that can never be explored.

2. The incarnation of Christ is the only means of "victory" over death and Hell.

Satan, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, had usurped dominion over the whole race of man, which he would have retained forever—if God himself had not interposed to rescue us from our sore bondage. But how should even God himself effect this great deliverance? No way was found, but for God himself to take our nature, and become our substitute. What joy then should not the execution of this plan excite in our hearts!

3. The incarnation of Christ opens salvation to a ruined world.

By this was "made known" the way of "righteousness and salvation" through a vicarious sacrifice; nor was it any longer set forth in types, but "openly," in plain explicit declarations; and that, not to the house of Israel only, but "in the sight of the heathen." How should we benighted Gentiles rejoice in this!

4. The incarnation of Christ is the richest display of God's mercy and truth.

It was in this incomprehensible mystery that "mercy and truth" met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. When the incarnation of Christ was first promised to the world, it was a most stupendous act of mercy; after that, the accomplishment of it was an exhibition of truth and faithfulness. Yes, it was:  
virtually the substance of all the types,  
the completion of all the prophecies,  
the consummation of all the promises.

Surely we must rejoice in it!

After stating such grounds for joy, we may add with confidence:

II. An exhortation to rejoice.

The animated exhortation of the Psalmist implies that,

1. We should desire a saving interest in this great event.

It is by no means sufficient to acknowledge Christ in a mere speculative manner; we should consider ourselves as the subjects of his kingdom, and seek to participate the blessedness of his people.

Let us then inquire, not merely whether we believe that Christ came into the world, but whether we have been filled with wonder at his "marvelous" condescension?

Let us ask ourselves whether "his right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory" over our rebellious hearts? Whether "he has made known" to us the sufficiency of "his righteousness," and the excellency of "his salvation?" Whether "his mercy and truth" have been magnified in the forgiveness of our sins, and in our renovation after his divine image? All our pretenses to joy will be vile hypocrisy, if we have not experienced, in some measure at least, these triumphs of his love, these victories of his grace.

2. We should express our gratitude for it:

With **frequency**.

It is not at one particular season only that we should call these things to remembrance, but frequently, yes, continually; since we every moment reap the benefits of Christ's administration. As the fire that burnt upon the altar was never allowed to go out, so neither should the flames of love and gratitude ever be extinguished in our hearts.

With **fervor**.

With what energy does the Psalmist repeat and diversify his exhortations to rejoice! Shall we then he contented to offer to our Lord a few cold and languid acknowledgments? No! We should make melody in our hearts unto him; we should even shout for joy. What if the world accuses us of enthusiasm? Shall we relax the tone of Christian joy for them; or bring down the injunctions of Heaven to the standard of their vain religion? Let the angels or glorified saints be blamed for carrying their exultations to excess—would they regard it, and compliment their accusers at the expense of duty? We plead not indeed for anything that is extravagant and foolish; but if we can obtain more of Heaven in our hearts, and manifest it more in our lives, let us not be afraid or ashamed to do it.

With **unanimity**.

The Psalmist calls, not only upon all the human race, but even upon the whole inanimate creation, to join in songs of praise and thanksgiving. And how lamentable is it that there should be found a creature upon earth, a rational and redeemed creature, that is indisposed for this exercise! O let us all be of one heart and mind; let us sing, rejoice, and give thanks; let our harps no longer be hung upon the willows, or struck in commendation of carnal joys; but let them be tuned in honor of our incarnate God; and let us celebrate upon them Messiah's praise. Thus shall even now our joy be unspeakable and full of glory, a preparation for glory, and a foretaste of Heaven!