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GENTILES CALLED TO GLORIFY GOD

**[Psalm 100:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 100.1-5)**

"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations!"

In discoursing upon short and insulated passages, we have scope for discussion upon whatever topic may come before us; but, in taking a whole Psalm for our subject, we can do little more than mark the spirit of it, together with its general import.

In truth, the Psalm before us, which is entitled "A Psalm of praise," requires no particular discussion; it is merely a call to the whole world to render unto God the honor due unto his name. It is obviously addressed to the Gentiles, as much as to the Jews; and may therefore, as Paul informs us, be considered, not as an exhortation only, but as a prophecy, that, in due season, the Gentiles, even to the remotest ends of the earth, shall "see the salvation of God! [Romans 15:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.9-11)."

That we may present the contents of the Psalm before you in an orderly way, we would observe that we have in it,

I. A call to delight ourselves in God.

We, as Gentiles, are particularly invited to engage in this blessed work. Religion is not a source of melancholy, but of sacred and exalted joy. At the commencement of the year of Jubilee, the trumpets sounded throughout all the land of Israel; and the joy which they diffused, no words are adequate to express. The man who, from whatever cause, had parted with his possessions, and sold himself for a slave, was restored to perfect liberty, and to the full enjoyment of his paternal inheritance. What a surprising change to be wrought in one moment! And with what exquisite delight would it be welcomed, by those who for days and months and years had been waiting for it!

Such "a joyful noise should we make unto the Lord," as people liberated from the most cruel bondage, and invested with all the blessings of an eternal inheritance. "From all other lords that have had dominion over us," we should now turn to serve the Lord, even that adorable Savior who has made us free; yes, we should "serve him with a willing heart! 1 Chronicles 28:9," "coming into his presence," and walking constantly before him, as his redeemed people. Our sighs and tears should all be put away; and we should "sing unto the Lord a new song, as full of joy, for the marvelous things which he has done! [Psalm 98:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 98.1)."

I do not mean to say, that there should be no times for humiliation and contrition; for such seasons will be needed, even to our dying hour. But the more abiding frame of our minds should be joy; as it is said, "Rejoice evermore!" "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice!"

We may next observe,

II. The grounds of this duty stated.

The Lord whom we serve is no other than Jehovah, the only true God. Yes, though in his human nature he has died for us, in his divine nature he is the Most High over all, "God blessed forever." Prophets and Apostles bear ample testimony to this, [Isaiah 45:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21-22). [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5), "Know it," therefore; and let it be treasured up in your minds as a ground of unutterable joy. And, while you contemplate his excellency, remember especially your obligations to him, "It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves." As creatures merely, it is unnecessary to say we have not made ourselves.

It is in reference to our new creation, as the people of God, that these words must be understood; and in this sense they contain a most important truth. We suppose that you have become the people of God, and the sheep of his pasture.

But who sought you out in your wanderings?

Who brought you home to the fold of Christ?

Who feeds you yet daily in green pastures?

Who protects you from all your enemies?

Who is the one source of all that you enjoy?

Can it in any measure be ascribed to yourselves?

Have you wrought it by any power of your own? Or have you merited that it should be wrought for you?

No! "It is God who has made us for this very purpose;" and he has done it, not for your righteousness sake, but for the glory of his own great name." It is "He who has made you to differ" from those who are yet far off from him; and "you have nothing, which you have not received" as a free gift from him! [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7).

Say, then, whether you have not reason to rejoice, and to "serve your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart! [Deuteronomy 28:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.47)."

As we proceed in the Psalm, we find,

III. A further statement of our duty.

While we are filled with joy, our God must have the glory. We must wait upon him in his public ordinances, as well as in our private chambers; and must "enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; we must be thankful unto him, and from our inmost souls must bless his holy name."

Indeed, if we duly contemplate his character, and the wonderful things which, in his sovereign goodness, he has wrought for us—we shall find our minds constantly attuned to this holy exercise; methinks, our every feeling will be gratitude, and our every word be praise. This is the return which our God looks for at our hands, "Whoever offers me praise, glorifies me." It is a better sacrifice than all the cattle upon a thousand hills, [Psalm 50:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.8-14); [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.23); and in the name of Jesus, our great Redeemer, we should be offering it continually, to the last hour of our lives! [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15). The inanimate and the brute creation praise their God; but we should bless him! [Psalm 145:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.10)."

We find also,

IV. Additional grounds for the performance of it.

The perfections of our God will afford us matter for praise to all eternity.

His goodness. Who can contemplate it, and not be filled with the profoundest admiration and gratitude? It is seen, wherever we turn our eyes.

But O! how is it seen in the gift of his only-begotten Son for a lost and perishing world! Well may we say, "What manner of love is this, with which the Father has loved us!" Think of it, my brethren; yes, dwell upon it day and night. It is not possible to have your minds too frequently or too intensely occupied with this mysterious subject!

His mercy, too; how inconceivable, both in its extent and duration! There is not a sinner in the universe to whom it will not reach, provided it is sought in God's appointed way; nor shall it be withdrawn from any to whom, for Christ's sake, it has been once imparted. Not but that God will punish sin; as he has said, "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! [Psalm 89:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-35)."

What His mercy has given to promise, His truth will assuredly fulfill; it shall endure, in its full extent, to all generations; nor shall "a jot or tittle of it ever fail."

And now I ask: Is there not ground for praise and thanksgiving? Is it not rather a wonder that any who profess to be his people, can find time for any other employment?

See, then, in this Psalm,

1. What is the proper effect of religion upon the soul.

Religion is supposed to generate gloom. But see it in the Psalmist's own experience; and see it in all whom he here addresses. Is this gloom or melancholy? Is it not the very reverse? Doubtless, as far as we deviate from true religion, we have need to weep and mourn; but, in proportion as we conform to it, and imbibe its spirit, it will fill us with unutterable joy.

What is it that the glorified saints are now doing in Heaven? Are they not beholding all the glory of their God and Savior, and singing his praise for all the wondrous works which he has done? This, then, is religion in perfection; and the privilege of God's people now is to be assimilated to them, in mind, in spirit, in employment. Be aware of this, my beloved brethren; and learn, not only to estimate genuine religion aright, but to have it reigning in your hearts, and exemplified in your lives!

2. How to attain joy in it's utmost.

It is not from ruminating on your own character, so much as from contemplating the character of your God and Savior, that you are to attain this heavenly joy. Doubtless you must study well your own hearts; else you will be strangers to humility and contrition; but joy can flow only from the knowledge of your God, in all the perfections of his nature, and in all the wonders of his love. Behold then, with increasing earnestness, "the glory of your Lord, and you shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord!"

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MERCY AND JUDGMENT GROUNDS OF PRAISE

**[Psalm 101:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.1)**

"I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto you, O Lord, will I sing!"

There are many things in the Christian's experience, the precise quality of which he would find it difficult to determine, if they had not been recorded, as experienced by others, of whose piety we can have no doubt. To sing of mercy, and to be resigned to judgment—would appear to most Christians a suitable expression of their feelings under the different dispensations. But David, in a review of his past life, and under circumstances as they existed at the time when he wrote this Psalm, declared both mercy and judgment to be equally proper grounds for praise and thanksgiving; and the repetition of his determination to praise God for them showed that he spoke not inconsiderately, but the deliberate and determined purpose of his mind.

That we may be led to adopt the same pious determination, I will endeavor to set before you:

I. The dealings of God with his people in both his mercies and judgements.

We should naturally expect that God would act in a way of mercy only to his friends, and of judgment only to his enemies. But towards both the one and the other he sees fit to dispense a mixed lot, reserving the unmixed portion for the eternal world.

The ungodly, while partakers of some judgments, certainly enjoy many mercies.

The godly, while abounding in mercies, are exposed also to some judgments.

Some judgments the godly feel in common with the world at large.

In their bodies, they are liable to pain, sickness, and death, even as others. In their minds, too, they may be afflicted with the loss of friends, with ill-treatment from enemies, with distress in their families, with poverty in their worldly circumstances. In these respects, one lot comes to all; nor can we discern God's love towards them by anything of this outward nature, [Ecclesiastes 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.1).

To some judgments also the godly are subjected, that are peculiar to themselves.

The ungodly are not, in general, sensible of any particular tokens of God's displeasure, as arising out of any variations of their conduct towards him; but the saints, who know what it is to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon them, are very keenly sensible of his withdrawment from them, when, by any secret neglects, they have provoked him to hide his face from them; and such frowns from their heavenly Father are inexpressibly painful to their soul, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9); [Psalm 88:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14-16).

The temptations of Satan, too, to which the ungodly are, for the most part, utter strangers, are sometimes like fiery darts in the souls of the righteous. None can tell what "wrestlings" many a devout soul has "with the principalities and powers of Hell;" but truly, those, whose lot it is to sustain them, find them a source of extreme pain at the time, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12); [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16). Holy Job; [Job 6:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.2-4), and the Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:8, yes, and our blessed Lord himself, complained bitterly under these trials, [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.44); [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.53); from which the vassals of Satan are exempt, and to which they only who are his determined enemies are exposed.

Nor must I omit to mention the persecutions to which many are called to submit for righteousness sake. Those recorded in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews are amply sufficient to show that they are not easy to be borne, [Hebrews 11:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.36-37), nor altogether to be avoided, by any who will serve their God with fidelity and zeal! [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12).

Of course, in respect of the measure of these trials, there will be found a great difference among the saints of God; but of some measure, all, in their season, are called to participate.

But, as mixed as these dispensations are, we are nevertheless prepared to contemplate:

II. The **wisdom** and **goodness** of God displayed in both his mercies and judgements.

Mercies may be sent to the ungodly in judgment; as when "God gave the Israelites their desires, but sent leanness withal into their souls! [Psalm 106:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.15)."

Just so, in like manner, to his own people God often sends judgment in mercy. In truth, so are we constituted in our present imperfect state, that we could not bear either mercies or judgments, if they came alone.

Mercies, if unmixed, would "exalt us above measure, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7), twice mentioned in that one verse."

Judgments, if unmixed, would sink us into despondency.

A ship needs both sails and ballast, to carry it forward in safety; and so the Christian needs a diversity of dispensations, in order to accomplish in him the purposes of God's grace. God sends both mercies and afflictions to his people,

1. To conform them to the divine image.

The divine image consists not in any one perfection, but in an assemblage of every perfection that can possibly be imagined. Just so, the paragon of a Christian consists not in one grace, or even in one set of graces—but in a combination of all the graces which are suited to a redeemed soul, and calculated to advance the honor of our God.

Now, all of these graces are formed by that variety of dispensations of which we have been speaking. The workings of the soul under so many different circumstances will tend to show a man what he really is, and consequently to humble him in the dust before God; while the dealings of God with him will wonderfully display the character of God himself, and lead forth the soul in the devoutest acknowledgments to him for past mercies, and in the most implicit confidence in him for future blessings.

In a word, all the active and passive virtues will be generated in the soul, and be called forth into united and harmonious exercise; so that by these dispensations the believer will be assimilated unto "God, who is light itself, and in whom is no darkness at all! [1 John 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.5)."

2. To stimulate them in their way to glory.

Mercies have a tendency to fill the soul with love to God, and to make it pant for the full enjoyment of God in Heaven.

Judgments also operate to the same end, by weaning the soul from present things, and causing it to long for that heavenly rest which remains for it in the eternal world. It was not peculiar to the Apostle Paul to "desire to depart, and to be with Christ." Every one who feels the vanity of earthly things, and has a foretaste of the world to come, will be like-minded with him. A weariness of life may be felt, and is often felt, by the most ungodly of men. That, therefore, is not the experience which I am speaking of; that results from a total ignorance of God's mercies, and a dissatisfaction with their appointed lot.

The state of mind to which I refer, is well expressed by Paul, when he says, "We who are in this tabernacle 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)." To the voice of Christ, saying, "Behold, I come quickly," it responds with joyful confidence, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus! [Revelation 22:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.20)."

While they answer such ends as these, we cannot but see,

III. The light in which both God's mercies and judgements should invariably be viewed.

The saints in every age have acknowledged the goodness of God in afflictions.

David, in my text, speaks of judgment, as well as mercy, as the ground of his devoutest acknowledgments. And he elsewhere not only declares that "it is good for him to have been afflicted, [Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.71)," but traces his afflictions to the faithfulness of God, [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.75); evidently intimating, that he regarded them as comprehended in the covenant of grace, and as promised, so far as they should be needful for him, by a faithful and unchanging God.

Paul even "took pleasure in them" in this view, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10); and regarded them not only as light, but "as lightness itself", from the consideration that they were "working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18)."

The same experience also is ascribed to all the saints; for, of every true Christian it is said, "We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope makes not ashamed, [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5)."

And **we**also should be prepared to join in their anthems of praise.

Our views of eternity should swallow up all inferior considerations; and that dispensation be most welcomed which most conduces to our eternal interests. To flesh and blood, that which is attended with present comfort appears best; but it is not really so. A wind that is somewhat cross will urge on a ship more steadily, and carry it forward more rapidly, than one which is quite direct; because it will fill all the sails.

In the same way, a measure of adversity will operate more favorably on our Christian course, than a state of unmixed prosperity. Taken in connection, the good and the evil mutually assist each other, and "work together for good unto all them that love God, and have been called by him according to his purpose, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)." Our blessed Lord himself "was made perfect through sufferings;" and what was subservient to his benefit, cannot fail of being conducive to ours also; and consequently, the acknowledgments which we should make respecting them in the eternal world should now at this time constitute an essential part of our thanksgivings to God.

Who does not see here.

1. The value and importance of **faith**!

Sense beholds things as they appear.

Faith beholds them as they really are.

Faith views them both in their source and end; it traces everything to God, as the all-wise and infinitely gracious Disposer of all events. Faith comprehends that saying, "Is there evil in the city and the Lord has not done it?" It fully accedes, also, to that inspired declaration, "Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives."

Hence, if our mercies were unmixed, it would be far from regarding it as a token for good; it would rather suggest, that we were bastards and not sons; because there is no son whom a wise father does not chastens! [Hebrews 12:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6-8). Learn then, my brethren, to "walk by faith and not by sight! [2 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.7)."

You well know how greatly Jacob erred when he said, "All these things are against me!" [Genesis 42:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.36). In fact, the very events which he so much deplored, were the means which God had ordained for the preservation of himself and all his family!

Job too, in the midst of all his trials, little thought what the result would be. "You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful!" [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)

In the same way, if you will wait to see the Lord's end in everything that wears a harmful aspect in His dispensations towards you—I may venture to assure you that the time is coming when you shall add your testimony to that of old, "He has done all things well!" Your way may be circuitous and painful; but you will find, at the last, that "He has led you in the right way!"

2. The blessedness of true believers!

Where is the man under Heaven, except the believer, who can adopt the language of the text, or carry it into effect? Ungodly men may sing when all goes well with them; but where is he who will sing in the midst of his afflictions, and make his afflictions themselves a ground of joy? Nowhere is that man to be found, but in Christ's redeemed people; for it is to his believing people only that "God gives songs in the night."

On the other hand, there is not a saved individual who is not privileged to experience this joy, and who does not actually possess it in proportion as he has made progress in the divine life. Hear the prophet of old, "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! [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18)."

Take this for your pattern, brethren. You may be brought into trials which may seem to threaten your very existence; but, however the storm may rage, your Savior is embarked in the vessel with you; yes, and He is also sitting at the helm. Only reflect on his conflicts, victories, and triumphs—and you will see the way that is marked out for you; and as He fought and overcame, and has sat down upon his Father's throne, so shall you also overcome, and enjoy the full recompense of your trials upon your Father's throne forever and ever!

And say, whether there will be one incident for which you will not bless your God in the eternal world? If not, then view everything now as proceeding from his love, and as leading to the full enjoyment of Heaven; and sing now both of mercy and judgment, as you will sing, when they shall have come to their final termination, and all present scenes shall be consummated in eternal bliss.

I conclude, then, with that direction of the Apostle which is so suited to the occasion, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you! [1 Thessalonians 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.18)."

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A WISE DEPORTMENT DELINEATED

**[Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)**

"I will be careful to lead a blameless life . . . I will walk in my house with integrity of heart."

Extensive influence is a most invaluable talent, which entails upon us a solemn responsibility, and should therefore be improved with all possible care and diligence. The higher we are in the scale of society, the more our obligations to exert ourselves for God are increased. But, if wisdom direct not our measures, our most strenuous efforts will be in vain.

David was well convinced of this truth; and, having seen in his own experience a wise admixture of mercy and of judgment in the dealings of God towards him, he determined, in his limited sphere of action, to imitate the conduct of the Governor of the Universe, and so to temper mercy with justice in the whole of his administration, that iniquity might be suppressed, and virtue cultivated—not in his own palace only, but throughout all his dominions.

We might profitably enter into an investigation of the principles which he laid down for the regulation of his conduct, and mark the specific course of action which he determined to pursue towards his courtiers; but we shall wave the consideration of those particulars, and notice rather the general principle which he adopted, and which is equally applicable to people in every station of life, "I will be careful to lead a blameless life . . . I will walk in my house with integrity of heart."

A noble resolution this! We will endeavor to point out,

I. The great importance of David's resolution.

The value of religion, generally, is acknowledged by all; but few are aware of the vast importance of a wise, discreet, and prudent deportment; yet on that essentially depend:

1. The peace and comfort of our own souls.

An indiscreet conduct, even where the person's intentions on the whole are good, will involve him in many difficulties, and rob him of those supports and consolations which under other circumstances he might enjoy. True it is, that the wisest demeanor will not avail to root out prejudice, or to make religion lovely in the eyes of carnal men; for the children of darkness cannot but hate the light. Our blessed Lord himself, in whose conduct not the slightest fault or error could be found, was an object of universal hatred to the whole Jewish nation.

But it is no less true, that imprudence in religious characters calls forth against them, and, in appearance, justifies, the malignity of many, who, if their zeal had been better regulated, would never have raised their arm against it.

Many parents, masters, magistrates, who would never have interposed their authority to obstruct a prudent exercise of religion, have been induced to exert their power in consequence of the indiscretion of those whom they were constrained to oppose. In such cases their opposition can scarcely be called persecution; nor can the cross which the sufferers are called to bear, be called "the cross of Christ;" it is their own cross, that they have to bear, and their own folly, that they have to blame. Enthusiasts do indeed persuade themselves that they are suffering for righteousness sake; but having no satisfactory evidence that such is indeed the true ground of their trials, they cannot feel that humble acquiescence in the divine appointments, which, if they had acted a wiser part, would have calmed their spirits, and sweetened their afflictions, [1 Peter 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.19-20); [1 Peter 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.15-16).

2. The benefit to all around us.

Nothing can be more unreasonable than that men should condemn true religion for the faults of those who profess it; but they will do so, and will take occasion from the misconduct of religious people to defame and decry all vital godliness, [2 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.2).

It is of no consequence in their eyes, that the wise and prudent condemn the things that are complained of; no; their adversaries are not disposed to discriminate between the guilty and the innocent; they involve all in the same obloquy; and will bring the faults of former ages as grounds of accusation against those who live in the present day. The errors of the Puritans are imputed to those who profess religion in the present day. Even the errors that were acknowledged and lamented by the people who in early life committed them, are still adduced as characterizing not only the people who openly renounced them, but those also who have never in any degree approximated towards them.

On the other hand, great good is done by those who "walk in integrity," and "shine forth as lights in the world, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16)." They "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.15)," and "shame those who falsely accuse their good conduct in Christ, [1 Peter 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.16)." What Peter says of "wives winning by their good conduct their unbelieving husbands, [1 Peter 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1)," we doubt not is often verified in all other relations of life; those who behold the light that is set before them being constrained to acknowledge, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor, [Proverbs 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.26)."

A certain awe is impressed on the minds of the ungodly by the sight of "a man of God." "Herod feared John," when he saw what a just and holy man he was, [Mark 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.20); and it is particularly said of Saul, that, "when he saw that David behaved himself very wisely, he feared him, [1 Samuel 18:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.15)." And if we will walk "holily, justly, and unblamably before men," then we shall have a testimony in their consciences, "that God is truly with us, [1 Corinthians 14:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.25)," and that the principles we profess are "worthy of all acceptance, [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)."

3. The honor of God and his Gospel.

The argument which Paul uses to enforce on servants the maintenance of a dutiful behavior towards their unbelieving masters, is, "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed, [1 Timothy 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.1)." How terrible is the thought that our indiscretions should ever produce such an effect as this!

On the other hand, our blessed Lord bids us to "make our light shine before men, that those who behold our good works may be stirred up to glorify our heavenly Father, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)." What a stimulus is here! What a motive to circumspection! What an incentive to everything that is great and holy!

Believer, can you reflect one moment on the thought, that God can be glorified in you, and not determine, like David, "I will be careful to lead a blameless life . . . I will walk in my house with integrity of heart." If nothing but your own welfare and the welfare of your fellow-creatures were at stake, you would watch over your every action, your every disposition; but when you consider, that the honor of God himself is in a measure dependent upon you, methinks, you should be utterly purposed, that, if it is possible, "God himself shall not find anything amiss with you, [Psalm 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.3); and that, at all events, your conduct shall be so blameless, "that they who are of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you, [Titus 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.8)."

Having shown the importance of this resolution, we will distinctly mark,

II. The way in which David's resolution must be carried into effect.

"I will be careful to lead a blameless life . . . I will walk in my house with integrity of heart."

It is scarcely needful to say, that we must have respect to every commandment of God, without partiality or reserve; for where there is partiality there is hypocrisy, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17); and where there is hypocrisy, there is neither "a perfect heart," nor "a perfect way," nor indeed one spark of true "wisdom."

This then must be ever borne in mind, that without an unreserved endeavor to fulfill the whole will of God, the forming of such a resolution must be altogether nugatory and delusive. But supposing the resolution to be sincerely formed, then the question will arise: How must a person conduct himself so as really to effect his wish?

1. The believer must conduct himself with **meekness** and **modesty**.

Nothing is more disgusting than rudeness in a religious character. It is offensive in any; but most of all in one who professes to feel himself to be a poor, blind, ignorant, guilty creature, "less than the least of all saints," yes, rather, "the very chief of sinners!"

How unfitting is it to see such a one full of pride, obtrusive, talkative, loving pre-eminence, and "thinking himself to be something, when he is nothing! [Galatians 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3)." Yet how many such professors are there, wherever the Gospel is preached!

On the other hand, how lovely is the character of one that is gentle, modest, unassuming, arrogating nothing to himself, and willing on all occasions to "take the lowest place!" Such a person, while he himself "is beautified with salvation, [Psalm 149:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.4)," reflects an honor on the Gospel, and "adorns the doctrine of God our Savior! [Titus 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.10)." Such a disposition is lovely even in the sight of God himself, and is esteemed by him as "an ornament of great price, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4)."

It would seem that this was a distinguishing feature in our Lord's character, since the Apostle particularly beseeches us "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.1);" and the more we have of the mind of Christ in this respect, the more "wisely shall we walk both towards them that are outside, [Colossians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.5)," the pale of the Church, and those that are within. The lack of this disposition renders our way far more difficult while it incapacitates us for encountering the difficulties which it puts in our way.

This then we conceive to be our first object: to obtain a humble and subdued spirit, which, while it offends none who differ from us, qualifies us to bear with patience, and to turn to good account, whatever evils the unreasonableness of wicked men may inflict upon us. By means of it we shall "out of the eater bring forth meat, and out of the strong bring forth sweet;" or, in other words, we shall make "all things work together for our good."

2. The believer must conduct himself with **kindness** and **love** towards the wicked.

There is in many religious professors almost the same acrimony against the ungodly world, as there is in the ungodly world against them! But how unfitting is this! For if there is any difference between us and others, it is God alone who has made us to differ! [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7).

And, if we see others yet living in their natural enmity and rebellion against God—then their forlorn state calls for nothing but pity and compassion!

Besides, love is the very end, yes the sum and substance, of all practical religion [1 Timothy 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.5). If we have not love, we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and our body to be burned, and yet be no better than "sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals [1 Corinthians 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1)." If this principle of sincere love does not preside in our hearts, we shall do nothing well, [1 Corinthians 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.14). This will lead us to consult the best interests of all around us; to study how we may most influence them for their good; and to bend to circumstances, in order to abate their prejudice, and gain the easier access to their minds. It was from this principle that Paul "became all things to all men, [1 Corinthians 9:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.19-22)." If he might but "gain the more," he was ready to deny himself the most innocent enjoyments, and to comply with any requisitions, which would consist with fidelity to his God. How conciliatory will be the conduct of one who acts under this principle! With what "meekness will he give to an inquirer a reason of the hope that is in him, [1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.15); and convey instruction to a blind and obstinate opposer, [2 Timothy 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25). How cautiously will he "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against him, [2 Corinthians 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.12)." How watchfully will he "abstain even from the appearance of evil, [1 Thessalonians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.22)," and prevent, if possible, his good from being evil spoken of, [Romans 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.16).

In a word, where love is in the heart, and "the law of kindness is in the lips," the enemies of religion will be "put to silence, and the mouths of gainsayers be stopped."

3. The believer must conduct himself with integrity and prudence.

Solomon observes, "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence, [Proverbs 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.12)." But many seem to think that they have nothing to do with prudence; they have only to follow their own notions of duty, and to leave all consequences to God. Hence they go forward in their own way, and in their own spirit; never once considering what may be the effect of their conduct on the minds of others; and, though they may do some good, they do more injury than they can conceive. But if we would behave ourselves wisely, we must consider the probable consequences of our actions, [Ecclesiastes 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 8.5), and endeavor to accomplish our ends by the most inoffensive means.

When Paul went to Jerusalem, where God's design of calling the Gentiles into his Church, and of abrogating the Mosaic ritual, was but imperfectly understood, he took the precaution of conferring privately with the leading members of that Church in the first instance, [Galatians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.2), in order to explain his views to them, and through them to remove the prejudices of the people at large. This was wise; and the wisdom of it appeared in the effects which followed. Similar precautions should be used by us in all our commerce with the world at large, or with the Church in particular; we should "give no unnecessary offence either to the Jew, or to the Greek, or to the Church of God." We should consider what every one can bear; and should suit ourselves to his capacity or condition.

Our blessed Lord himself set this example for us, speaking everything in a way of parables, according as his auditors were able to receive it, [Mark 4:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.33). Paul also administered "milk or strong meat" to his converts, according as the measure of their proficiency required, [1 Corinthians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.2). And we also are taught to act under the influence of the same principle, towards all whom we may have occasion to address, "not casting our pearls before swine," "nor pouring new wine into old bottles," but accommodating our instructions to the necessities and dispositions of all who hear us. In a word, "I would," as Paul says, "have you wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning evil, [Romans 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.19)."

4. The believer must conduct himself with unselfishness and simplicity.

There is a carnal wisdom, which operates in a way of craft and cunning; but this is directly opposed to "the wisdom that is from above," which consists in simplicity and godly sincerity. "It is this, and this alone, that proceeds from the grace of God, and under the influence of which we are to have our conduct in the world, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12)." If there are any selfish objects proposed, any sinister motives indulged, any artifices practiced by us, we are far from true wisdom; true wisdom disclaims everything that is disingenuous. Its eye is single, its object pure, its operation lucid, uniform, honorable. It will bear the light; it will shine the brightest, where it is brought most to view. If it make us "wise as serpents, it will keep us harmless as doves, [Matthew 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.16)."

Every measure of deceit must be banished; all falsehood, either in word or deed, abhorred; and truth and equity must stand confessed in the whole of our dealings. This is true wisdom; and, "whoever walks according to this rule, peace shall be upon him, and mercy, even upon all the Israel of God, [Galatians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.16)."

We **conclude** with one or two directions for the attainment and increase of this wisdom:

1. Let a conformity to its dictates be your constant aim.

"The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, [Proverbs 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.8)." If we walk at random, and without a due consideration of our ways, we never shall attain any true wisdom. We must be aware that folly is bound up in our hearts, and that we are constantly liable to err. We must take our rule of action from the unerring words of truth. We must measure our opinions and actions by that rule.

We must in particular set the Lord Jesus Christ ever before us, and endeavor to drink into his spirit, and to walk in his steps. This must be our constant habit. Whether our actions be more or less important, they must all be referred to this standard, and be regulated by this principle. Then we shall gradually have our minds enlightened; we shall see with increasing evidence our former deviations from the right path. We shall see, how erroneously we judged on many occasions; and how unwisely we acted, while yet we thought that we were acting right. Thus our judgment will be matured; our consciences be preserved tender; and our ways be conformed to the perfect will of God. "Who then is wise and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good convduct his works with meekness of wisdom [James 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.13)."

2. Pray earnestly to God to inspire you with it.

It is "the Lord alone that gives wisdom, [Proverbs 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.6);" and to him David directed his supplications, in the words of our text, "O when will you come unto me?" David felt his insufficiency for that great work which lay before him, and he panted after an increase of grace to fit him for it. Thus we should pant after the influences of the Holy Spirit, to "open the eyes of our understanding," and to "guide us into all truth." Without the aid of the Holy Spirit, we cannot hope to fill up our several stations in life with true wisdom.

David, as a monarch, felt his need of divine aid to execute the resolution he had formed.

Solomon desired this aid beyond either riches or honor; and God, in answer to his prayer, "gave him a wise and understanding heart," above all the children of men.

As ministers of God's Word, we need the same; for Paul says, in reference to the ministry, "who is sufficient for these things?"

The same must be said by us in every station and relation of life. We all have our own peculiar duties to perform; and wisdom consists in executing them aright. Let this never be forgotten, that our chief wisdom consists in ascertaining with precision, and performing with punctuality, the duties of our own particular situation. It is not by going out of our own proper line, but by filling our own particular station well, that we shall approve ourselves truly wise. Let parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, bear this in mind, "let none lean to their own understanding, [Proverbs 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.5)," but all with one heart address to God this necessary petition, "O give me understanding in the way of godliness!"

#669

INTEGRITY

**[Psalm 101:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.3)**

"I hate the practice of transgression; it will not cling to me."

To improve our influence for God, is our bounden duty, whatever be the station to which he has been pleased to call us. Magistrates, in particular, may render most extensive service to the community, by exerting their power in the promotion of virtue.

David felt his responsibility in this respect; and, either on his beginning to reign in Hebron after the death of Saul, or on his coming to the full possession of the kingdom at a subsequent period, he wrote this Psalm, declarative of his determination to discountenance evil, and encourage good, to the utmost extent of his power, both among his courtiers, and among his more immediate attendants in his household.

Let us consider,

I. The work which he here so determinately reprobates.

The two points to which he seems to refer are:

1. The practice of sin, or a lack of integrity in morals.

A dereliction of principle has often been indulged under the idea of expediency; and the utmost subtlety of argument has been employed in vindication of it. But integrity, undeviating integrity, should possess the Christian's mind. There are many things which will consist with what is called a sense of honor, which can never be admitted into the conduct of a real saint. The laws of honor have their origin from man; and as they derive their authority from man, so they have respect only to the judgment of man in the observance of them. These therefore may bend to times and circumstances. But the Law of God is inflexible; and our adherence to it must be uniform under all circumstances. It must regulate the ends which we propose, the means we use in the prosecution of them, and the manner in which we proceed throughout the whole of our deportment. In everything we must endeavor to approve ourselves to God, and to act as in his immediate presence. Any departure from the strict line of duty, in whatever circumstances we be placed, must be avoided; and our whole conduct towards mankind, in whatever relation to us they stand, must be such as we, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to observe towards us. God requires that "truth should be in our inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6);" and every act, every word, every purpose and desire of our hearts, ought to be in strict accordance with it.

2. A lack of constancy in religion.

Many there are, who, having begun well, leave off to behave themselves wisely, and "turn aside from the holy commandment delivered to them, 2 Peter 2:21."

Various are the sources of this declension.

Sometimes it begins in a neglect of holy duties, or in the mere formal performance of them.

Sometimes it originates in the secret indulgence of some hidden lust.

Sometimes "the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches," and the desire for other things which have no direct reference to religion—choke the seed that has been sown in our hearts, and prevent it from bringing forth any fruit unto perfection, [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22).

But whatever it is that turns us from God, it should be discountenanced in others, and avoided in ourselves. It may have a subtle aspect; much may be said for it to extenuate, if not altogether to justify, the practice of it; but if its operation is to turn us aside from God, and from the pursuit of heavenly things, then it becomes an evil work, which it behooves us to renounce!

We must, however, be careful not to impute to any line of duty the evils which arise from our own lack of care in the prosecution of it. There is not anything which we may not make an occasion of sin. A person may say, 'I have intellectual pursuits, which occupy my mind with such intensity, that I cannot fix it afterwards upon heavenly things.' Or, 'I am a manual laborer, which indisposes me for heavenly contemplation.' In such cases, the duty of these people is, not to renounce the labors to which, in the course of providence, they have been called, but to implore of God such a measure of spiritual strength as may enable them to combine the duties which they have been accustomed to separate. Nor can we doubt, but that, if they be upright in heart, they shall have imparted to them, grace sufficient for the conscientious discharge of all their duties. The point for them especially to attend to, is, that they guard against every inordinate desire; for it is from their inward desires, rather than their outward duties, that they are in any danger of being drawn from God.

The conduct of the Psalmist, in relation to such "work," shows,

II. The disposition which we also should manifest towards it.

1. We should abhor sin in **principle**.

There should be in us an attraction towards God, resembling that of the needle to the pole. A needle may, by force, be turned from its proper direction; but it will never cease from a tremulous motion, until it has returned again to its proper rest. So it may be with us. We know not what deviations a sudden impulse of temptation may cause for a moment; but the very instant we perceive that we have departed, even in thought, from the perfect line of duty, we should give neither sleep to our eyes nor slumber to our eye-lids, until we have returned with penitential sorrow to our God.

The direction given to us by God is, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good! [Romans 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.9)." And, whether in relation to morals or religion, this must be the constant habit of our minds. We must be "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)."

2. We should avoid sin in **practice**.

We never can be too observant of our own ways. As, at sea, the mariner is often drawn from his course by currents of which he was not aware, and only finds his deviation from his appointed course by the observations which he makes. In the same way, it is possible for a Christian to be drawn aside by a corrupt bias, until he has carefully compared his ways with the unerring standard of the Word of God. Hence the need of attending to that divine counsel, "Prove all things; and hold fast that which is good, [1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21)."

It is not without extreme care that we shall be able to "keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." We are passing through a polluted world; and it is very difficult to "keep our garments altogether undefiled! [Revelation 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.4)." But if we come in contact with evil, we must take care that it does "not cleave unto us." It must be the one labor of our lives to be "sincere, and without offence, until the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.10)."

ADDRESS.

1. Mark well the beginnings of spiritual declension.

"Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith," says the Apostle, "prove your own selves, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)." Let the first symptoms of spiritual declension be carefully noted by you, and be made an occasion of augmented diligence in your heavenly course. Many evils will you avoid by such watchfulness. Happy would it have been for David, if he had marked the first risings of desire, which the sight of Bathsheba excited in his soul. And happy will it be for us, if we determine, through grace, to abstain, not from evil only, but from the first motions of it. Yes, and even "the very appearance of it," whether in heart or life! [1 Thessalonians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.22).

2. Avoid the means and occasions of spiritual declension.

Our Lord teaches us to pray, that we may "not be led into temptation." In truth, it we willingly subject ourselves to temptation, we cannot expect to be kept. We must "take heed to our ways," and shun the scenes of vice and folly; and avoid the company, and conversation, and books, and sights, that would ensnare us—if we would be preserved "holy and unblamable and unreprovable in the world." If we "come out from among the ungodly, and touch not the impure thing, then will God be a Father unto us, and we shall be his sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty! [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17-18)."

#670

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS

**[Psalm 102:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.13-15)**

"You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory!"

Amidst all the personal afflictions with which a child of God can be encompassed, he will be filled with consolation, if he hears glad tidings concerning Zion. The interests of God and the welfare of mankind are nearer to his heart than any of the concerns of time and sense. Hence Paul, when complaining that he "suffered trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds," consoled himself with this, that "the Word of God was not bound, [2 Timothy 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.9);" yes, his very bonds themselves were an occasion of joy to his soul, when he saw that they were overruled for the establishment of believers, and the augmentation of the Church of God, [Philippians 1:12-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12-18).

Thus, in the Psalm before us, the writer, whether speaking in his own person, or impersonating the Church of God, was in a most disconsolate condition, verse 3-11; but the thought of God's speedy interposition for his Church and people comforted him. He saw Jerusalem lying in ruins; but he felt assured that the time was near at hand, when it should be rebuilt, and God's glory be manifested in it as in the days of old. To the Gospel Church also, he had a further reference in his own mind; for though the restoration of the Jews from Babylon attracted some attention from the neighboring states, it was far from being attended with those effects which are here foretold as following from their yet future restoration to their own land, and their final union with the Church of Christ. That the writer looks forward to that period, will appear by comparing verse 25-27 with [Hebrews 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.10-12).

In considering this event, we shall notice,

I. The time fixed for it.

God most assuredly has mercy in store for Zion.

The Jews shall not always continue in their present degraded state; they shall be gathered from every quarter of the globe, and be brought back again to their own land. We must almost cease to assign any determinate meaning to words, if we explain in a figurative sense only the numberless declarations of God on this subject, [Ezekiel 28:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 28.25-26); [Ezekiel 37:1-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.1-28). As to their restoration to the Divine favor, it is impossible for anyone who believes the Scriptures to doubt of it. Though God is angry with them, he has not cast them off forever. There is yet among them "a remnant according to the election of grace," who shall be again engrafted on their own olive-tree, and enjoy all the riches of Gospel salvation, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5); [Romans 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.25-26).

For the conferring of "these favors," there is a time fixed in the Divine counsels.

"Known unto God are all things from the foundation of the world;" and everything that is "done, is done according to his determinate counsel and foreknowledge, [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23); [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28)."

The deliverance of the Jews from Egypt was foretold to Abraham four hundred and thirty years before it took place; and it was accomplished on the self-same day that had been then fixed, [Exodus 12:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.41).

In like manner, their deliverance from Babylon was fixed; nor were they detained one hour there beyond the seventy years that had been assigned for their captivity, [Jeremiah 25:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 25.12); [Jeremiah 29:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.10). Thus is the period fixed for their present dispersion. It is to terminate one thousand two hundred and sixty years after the establishment of the Papal tyranny and of the Mohammedan delusion. Other thirty years are added to that time for completing of that glorious work, and forty-five more for the full introduction of the Millennium, when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! [Daniel 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.25); [Daniel 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.7); [Daniel 12:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.11-12) with [Revelation 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 11.3); [Revelation 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 11.15); [Revelation 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.6); [Revelation 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.14); [Revelation 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.5).

Respecting the exact time from whence these several periods must be dated, commentators are not agreed; nor is it our intention to enter into that part of the question; we only mention these things to show that "God has reserved the times and the seasons in his own power," and that the time for the future restoration of the Jews is as determinately fixed in the Divine counsels, as any other event that ever occurred.

We think too that we may already see,

II. The signs of its approach.

When our blessed Lord came to establish his kingdom upon earth, there were many signs whereby a candid observer might ascertain that he was really come, [Matthew 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.3). An expectation of him had prevailed both among Jews and Gentiles, [Luke 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.25); [Luke 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.38). His forerunner, John the Baptist, had come to prepare his way [Matthew 17:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.9-13); and his own miracles had evinced that he was indeed the person whom he professed to be, [John 5:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.36).

Thus the Psalmist intimates that there are signs whereby the future manifestations of his love and mercy to his people Israel shall be discerned, previous to their full accomplishment, "The time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come; for your servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof." We say then that the approach of that blessed period is now evidently marked by:

1. The concern that is now felt for the Jewish people.

How many centuries have passed without any efforts made for their conversion to the gospel of Christ! They have been regarded by the Christian world as utterly unworthy of notice; or rather, have been treated by them with all manner of indignity, oppression, and cruelty. But now Christians begin to feel how basely they have acted towards them; and are combining their efforts to rend the veil from their hearts; and by all possible means to lead them to the knowledge of that Messiah, whom their fathers crucified The attention paid to the study of prophecy in this day is remarkable.

2. The expectation which the Jews have of their approaching deliverance.

The Jews even of our own country, and still more upon the Continent, have a persuasion that their Messiah is speedily to appear, and to vindicate them from the oppression which they have so long experienced. People conversant with India have assured us that both Muhammadans and Hindus have an expectation also that a great change is about to take place in the religions which they profess. And though the Jews do not at present know what kinds of blessings they are destined to enjoy, (for they look no further than to a temporal deliverance,) yet the circumstance of their "looking for redemption" as fast approaching, may justly be regarded as a sign of its actual approach.

3. The work that has already been effected among them.

Many have been converted to the gospel of Christ; and though, as in the first ages of Christianity, many have dishonored, or renounced, their holy profession—yet many have held fast their faith amidst the heaviest trials, and have adorned the Gospel by a holy life. We cannot, it is true, boast of thousands converted at once; nor were the efforts or John, and of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, very successful for a season; even after all the labors and miracles of our Lord, his disciples amounted only to five hundred; the greatest part of those who were convinced by him for a season having gone back from him; but the seed sown by him grew up on the day of Pentecost, and brought forth fruit a hundred-fold.

In like manner we have only fruit sufficient at present to encourage our continued exertions; but we hope that Pentecostal fruits will yet be found, and that too at no distant period. At all events we have evidence enough to show, that God is with us in our labors of love, and to assure us, that we shall not labor in vain, or run in vain. The very circumstance of so many heralds being stirred up to prepare their way, is a strong ground of hope that before long "the valleys shall be exalted, and the mountains and hills be made low, and the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain; and that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together! [Isaiah 40:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.3-5)."

Nor are we left in uncertainty about,

III. The effects of its arrival.

To the **Jews** themselves the effects will be glorious.

Such prosperity, both temporal and spiritual, will they enjoy, as was but faintly typified in the days of Solomon, "The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the breach of his people, and heals the stroke of their wound, [Isaiah 30:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.26)".

To the **Gentiles** also it will be the commencement of inconceivable and universal happiness.

This is particularly marked in our text, "So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord;" yes, the restoration and conversion of the Jews will be "as life from the dead" to the whole Gentile world, [Romans 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.12); [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.15). Their deliverances from Egypt and from Babylon attracted the attention of the nations which were round about them; but this deliverance will fill all the nations upon earth with surprise and astonishment; for the Jews are scattered through every country under Heaven; and in every country there will be a simultaneous motion of the Jews towards their own land, and a turning to that Savior, whom now they hate. This will carry conviction to the minds of all, that Jesus is the true Messiah, the only, and all-sufficient Savior of the whole world. Then will all the great ones of the earth, the highest kings, no less than their lowest subjects, behold the glory of God in the face of our adorable Savior; and all, both Jews and Gentiles, become one fold under one Shepherd! See [Isaiah 60:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.1-8); [Isaiah 60:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.10-14). [Psalm 72:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.8-11); [Psalm 72:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.16-19). [Zechariah 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.10-12); [Zechariah 8:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.20-23); [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.9). However incredible this may appear, it shall assuredly be effected in due season; for the Lord has promised; and not a jot or tittle of his Word shall fail.

ADDRESS.

1. Have compassion upon Zion.

See how deplorable is the present state of God's ancient people; compare it with the former periods of their history when they were so signally honored with the presence of their God in the wilderness, and at Sinai, and in the days of David and Solomon. Shall not the contrast fill you with pity and compassion? Methinks you can scarcely have the feelings of men, much less of Christians, if you do not weep over their forlorn and destitute condition.

See how Nehemiah felt the desolations of Zion in his day, [Nehemiah 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.2-3). And is there not yet greater occasion for you to do so now?

See how Daniel set himself to implore mercy for his brethren, encouraged by the near approach of the time destined for their deliverance [Daniel 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.2-3).

And let the prospect we have of an infinitely greater deliverance for them, stimulate you to similar exertions in their behalf. Let nothing be lacking on your part that can contribute to their good. Your time, your money, your influence will be well employed in so glorious a cause; and be assured that in endeavoring to "water others, you shall be watered yourselves."

2. Seek to experience the good work in your own souls.

We would not so draw your attention to the vineyard of others, us to divert it from your own. If it is desirable for the Jews to "fear the name of the Lord, and to behold his glory," it is surely no less desirable for you also. Brethren, this charity must begin at home. It will be a fearful thing to "preach to others, and to become cast away ourselves." Begin then, every one of you, to seek the favor of God to your own souls. Truly it is lamentable to see in what a state our Christian Zion is; and how many among us differ little from the Jews, except in name and profession. And in this we are far more guilty than they, because, while they are misled through the blindness that is come upon them, we sin against light and knowledge, and Judas-like, betray the Savior whom we profess to love.

Let us hope, however, that the time for God to favor us is come; (O that it may be come, and that our eyes may see it!) and that the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, shall be speedily reared among us, to the glory of God, and to the salvation of many souls.

As much as we desire your aid for the Jewish nation, our first desire is, that you yourselves may be saved! In this we are sanctioned by the apostle Paul, who, while he pitied the Gentile world, desired to be accursed from Christ if it might but be instrumental to the saving of his brethren the Jews. To you then, brethren, we say, First give your own selves to the Lord, and afterwards to us, by the will of God, 2 Corinthians 8:5.

#671

THE ETERNITY AND IMMUTABILITY OF CHRIST

**[Psalm 102:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.25-28)**

"In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you."

Among all the Psalms, there is none more full of mourning and lamentation than this; but whether the Psalmist speaks in his own person, or in the person of the Church which was in the most desolate condition, is not certain. But though written at the return of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity, and referring primarily to the restoration of the Jewish Church and polity—it evidently has respect to the Messiah and the establishment of his Church on the face of the whole earth; since it is said, that "the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth his glory, verse 15."

Indeed the words of our text are expressly applied to Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and are adduced to show the infinite superiority of Christ above all the hosts of Heaven, [Hebrews 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.10-12). With this infallible guide to direct us, we proceed to point out,

I. The perfections of Christ.

The description here given of our Lord Jesus Christ proves beyond all doubt his proper Deity.

1. Observe Christ's **eternity**.

He it was who made the universe; the highest angels derived their existence from his all-creating hand! [Colossians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.16). "All things were created, not only by him, but for him, [Colossians 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.17);" which could not be, if he himself were a creature. Suppose him ever so high above all other creatures, if he himself was a creature, he could not have created all things, seeing he himself must have been created by another. But he is the eternal God, "he was with God, and was God; and without him was not any thing made that was made, [John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1-3)." Yes, that adorable Savior, who at the appointed season assumed our flesh at Bethlehem, was the eternal God, "his goings forth were of old, from everlasting, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2). The same truth is generally supposed to be declared in [Proverbs 8:22-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.22-31)."

1. Observe Christ's **immutability**.

The material creation is formed only as a theater for the display of the Creator's glory; and, when it shall have answered its destined end, it will be destroyed by fire! [2 Peter 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.10); [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12); the Creator will dissolve it with as much ease as a man "folds up a garment" for which he has no further use. But the Lord Jesus Christ will exist forever. As he is the eternal, so is he the immutable Jehovah, "He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8)."

Not to dwell on a point which requires neither confirmation nor discussion; we proceed to mark more distinctly,

II. The aspect of Christ's perfections on the welfare of the Church.

In the verse before the text, the Psalmist may be speaking personally of himself, just as Hezekiah did when apprehensive of speedy dissolution, [Isaiah 38:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.10-14); but in the close of the Psalm he indisputably speaks of the Church, and, represents as depending upon Christ,

1. The stability of the Church at large.

The seed here mentioned are the Church of God, the company of the faithful in every age, [Psalm 69:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.36). It might be supposed that these, surrounded us they are by enemies on every side, must be utterly destroyed; and, in fact, the Church has at times been reduced so low, as scarcely to have, except in name, any existence upon earth. But our Lord has founded it upon a rock; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Other things, however stable in appearance, shall vanish away; but this shall stand forever and ever! [Isaiah 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.6). The different individuals are successively removed by death; but children shall be born to God through the instrumentality of his Gospel, and the Church "continue" to the end of time.

2. The final salvation of every true believer.

It is a miracle, considering what difficulties the believer has to encounter, and how unable he is of himself to do even the least thing that is good—that anyone should finally attain the promised inheritance. But Jesus lives, and therefore all who sincerely trust in him shall live also. In his Word he is as immutable as in his essence; and "of that word not one jot or tittle shall ever fail." "Never will he leave them; never, never will he forsake them!" "He is able to keep them from falling;" and, "Of those whom the Father has given him, he will lose none."

Improvement.

Is there among you any tempted soul?

Methinks some may be in the state of the Psalmist, "eating ashes like bread, and mingling their drink with tears." But let not anyone be so bowed down with afflictions, as to say, "There is no hope." While your Redeemer lives, you have a sure refuge; and, whatever trials you may have to sustain, "his grace shall be sufficient for you".

To those who are maintaining their steadfastness in the Gospel.

We would say, Remember to whom you are indebted for your stability, "He who has wrought you to this self-same thing; is God." O think, what had been your state times without number, if your Almighty Savior had not interposed to rescue you from the jaws of that roaring lion that seeks to devour you. Let all your confidence be in him alone.

#672

DUTY OF PRAISING GOD FOR HIS MERCIES

**[Psalm 103:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-5)**

"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, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's!"

It is a favorite opinion of some, that we are bound to love God for his own perfections, without having any respect to the benefits which we receive from him. But this appears to us to be an unscriptural refinement.

That God deserves all possible love from his creatures on account of his own perfections, can admit of no doubt; and we can easily conceive, that people may be so occupied with an admiration of his perfections, as not to have in their minds any distinct reference to the benefits they have received from him.

But that any creature can place himself in the situation of a being who has no obligations to God for past mercies, and no expectation of future blessings from him, we very much doubt; nor are we aware that God any where requires us so to divest ourselves of all the feelings of humanity, for the sake of engaging more entirely in the contemplation of his perfections.

Nor indeed can we consent to the idea, that gratitude is so low a virtue, [Deuteronomy 28:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.47). On the contrary, gratitude seems to be the principle that animates all the hosts of the redeemed in Heaven; who are incessantly occupied in singing praises to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood! By gratitude, all the most eminent saints on earth have been distinguished.

In proof of this, we need go no further than to the Psalm before us, wherein the man after God's own heart adores and magnifies his Benefactor, for some particular mercies recently given unto him. To instill this principle into your minds, and to lead you to a measure of that devotion with which the sweet singer of Israel was inspired, we shall,

I. State the **grounds** we have to praise God.

To enumerate all the benefits we have received from God, would be impossible. We must content ourselves with adverting to them in the peculiar view in which they are set before us in the text. We would call you then to consider,

1. The **freeness** and **undeservedness**of God's blessings.

It is this which gives a zest to every blessing we enjoy; in this view, the very food we eat, and the air we breathe, demand our most grateful acknowledgments. The Psalmist begins with speaking of himself as a guilty and corrupt creature, who unless pardoned and renewed by the grace of God, must have been an everlasting monument of his righteous displeasure!

The same thought also should be uppermost in our minds. We should contrast our state with that of the fallen angels, who never had a Savior given unto them; and with that of the unbelieving world, who, in consequence of rejecting the Savior, have perished in their sins! What claim had we, any more than the fallen angels? And if we had been dealt with according to our deserts, where would have been the difference between us, and those who are gone beyond the reach, of mercy Let us but contemplate this, and the smallest mercy we enjoy will appear exceedingly great. Yes, anything short of Hell will be esteemed a mercy! See how this consideration enhanced the favors which God given to David, [Psalm 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.1); and Paul, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8).

2. The **richness**and **variety**of God's blessings.

The Psalm primarily relates to David's recovery from some heavy disorder; and the terms wherein he expresses his gratitude are precisely such as are used by other people on similar occasions, [Isaiah 38:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.17). On this account, in our review of God's mercies, it will be proper first to notice the blessings of his **providence**. How often have we been visited with some bodily disorder, which, for anything we know, has been sent as a preventive or punishment of sin! (We certainly have reason to think, that at this time, as well as in former ages, God punishes the sins of his people in this world, that they may not be condemned in the world to come! Compare [1 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.30); [1 Corinthians 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.32) with [James 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.15).) And how often have we been raised from a state of weakness and danger, to renewed life and vigor!

At all events, we have been beset with dangers, and yet not permitted to fall a sacrifice to them; and been encompassed with needs, which have been liberally supplied. Can we view all these mercies with indifference? Do they not demand from us a tribute of praise?

But the expressions in the text lead us to contemplate also the blessings of God's **grace**. And can we adopt the words in this view? O how great and wonderful are they, if we appreciate them aright! To have one sin forgiven is a mercy of inconceivable magnitude; but to be forgiven all—all that we have ever committed, this is a mercy which neither the tongues of men nor of angels can ever adequately declare.

Think too of the corruptions which with most inveterate malignity infect our souls; to have these healed! to have them all healed! We no longer wonder at the ardor of the Psalmist's devotion; we wonder only at our own stupidity.

Contemplate moreover the efforts which Satan, that roaring lion, is ever making to destroy us; consider his wiles, his deceits, his fiery darts; what a stupendous mercy is it that we have not been given up as a prey unto his teeth!

Look around at the mercies of all kinds with which we are encircled; and mark the provision of ordinances, and promises, yes, of the body and blood of God's only dear Son, with which our souls are nourished and renewed; so that our drooping spirits, like the eagle when renewed in its plumage, are enabled to soar to the highest heavens with confidence and joy. Can we find in these things no grounds of praise? Must not our hearts be harder than adamant itself, if they do not melt at the contemplation of such mercies as these?

3. The **constancy**and **continuance**of God's blessings.

See how triumphantly the Psalmist dwells on this. He forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, satisfies; and let us compare our experience with his.

Has not God made us also the objects of his providential care, by day and by night, from the earliest period of our existence to this present moment?

Has he not also renewed to us every day and hour the blessings of his grace, "watering us as his garden," and "encompassing us with his favor as with a shield?" Surely we may say that "goodness and mercy have followed us all our days;" there has not been one single moment when our Divine keeper has ever slumbered or slept; he has kept us, "even as the apple of his eye;" "lest any should hurt us, he has kept us day and night."

Say now, what are the feelings which such mercies should generate in our souls; and what are the returns which we ought to make to our heavenly Benefactor?

Not doubting but that all of you must acknowledge your obligation to praise God, we will, as God shall enable us,

II. Stir you up to the performance of praising God for all of his blessings.

It is the office of your minister to stir up your pure minds "by way of remembrance," yes, "to put you in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth."

1. We call upon you to praise God **individually**.

This is not the duty of ministers only, but of all, whatever their age, situation, or condition in life; every one is unspeakably indebted to God; and therefore every one should say for himself, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

If any object, that they have never yet been made partakers of the blessings of Divine grace, we answer, That you have not on this account the less reason to bless God; for the very "long-suffering of God should be accounted by you as salvation;" and if you compare your state (as yet on mercy's ground) with that of those who have been cut off in their sins, you will see that all the thanks which you can possibly render unto God, are infinitely less than what he deserves at your hands.

Moreover, if you have received no signal deliverances from sickness or danger, you have the more reason to adore your God, who has preserved you so long in the uninterrupted enjoyment of health and peace.

2. We call upon you to praise God **fervently**.

Praise is not a service of the lip and knee, but of the warmest affections of the soul. The "soul, and all that is within you," should be exercised in this blessed work. As you are to "love God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength," so also you are to bless him with all your faculties and abilities. You must not however mistake vociferation, and talkativeness, and bodily fervor, for devotion; your expressions of gratitude, even when most elevated and joyous, must resemble those which are used among the heavenly hosts; who "veil their faces and their feet," or "cast their crowns at the feet" of their adorable Redeemer. Not to bless him in this manner, is constructively and really to "forget the benefits" you have received from him; yes, an utter forgetfulness of them were less criminal than such an ungrateful remembrance.

3. We call upon you to praise God **incessantly**.

"Praise, praise, praise the Lord!" says the Psalmist to his soul; showing thereby that he would have that to be the continual exercise of his mind. Thus should we also labor to have our minds in a constant readiness for this glorious work.

We need not indeed be always engaged in the act of praise; for we have many other acts in which a great part of our time must be occupied; but the frame of our minds should always be disposed for this duty, so as to be ready for it whenever occasion may call for the performance of it. That we shall feel backwardness to it at times, must be expected; the Psalmist intimates as much, by so repeatedly urging his reluctant soul to this duty. But let us follow his example, and urge our souls, however reluctant, to this blessed work. Let us say with him, "Praise the Lord, O my soul; praise him, praise his holy name!" Or like Deborah, "Awake, awake! Deborah; awake, awake! utter a song!"

Thus to praise God is our privilege on earth;  
thus to praise him is a foretaste of Heaven.

#673

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

**[Psalm 103:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.8-14)**

"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."

We cannot form a juster conception of God than from the history of the Israelites. In the mixture of mercy and judgment which is there recorded, we see every one of his perfections displayed in most lively characters, verse 7. His dealings with us indeed are less discernible; but, the more they are scrutinized, the more will they appear to be regulated according to the counsels of unerring wisdom and unbounded goodness. The words before us will naturally lead us to a contemplation of this subject; and we shall have abundant evidence of their truth, while we consider his goodness,

I. God's goodness **generally**, as it is in **himself**.

The "mercy and grace" of our God are chiefly discovered by,

1. His patience in **bearing with us**.

Had God been such a one as ourselves, he would long since have broke forth in anger against the whole world, and consumed them in his heavy displeasure. But, notwithstanding the multitude of their provocations, he has been patient towards them, [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9), and has waited to be gracious unto them, [Isaiah 30:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.18). He has borne with many vessels of wrath, that have been daily fitting themselves for destruction, [Romans 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.22); and has kept mercy for thousands, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7), who have been continually occupied in casting it away. The description which Nehemiah gives of the divine patience as manifested in his day, [Nehemiah 9:16-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.16-21), is no less realized towards the whole world at this very hour!

2. His mercy in **pardoning** us.

God, in infinite compassion, laid our iniquities upon his only dear Son, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6), and exacted of him our debt, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7), in order that he might exercise mercy towards us consistently with the demands of truth and justice, [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26). And, having provided such a remedy, he delights in extending its benefits even to the vilest of the human race, [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18). Thousands that are now glorified in Heaven, and thousands too that are yet compassed with infirmities on earth, can attest that with him is plenteous, redemption, [Psalm 130:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.7-8), and that he is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him, [Romans 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.12-13).

Not to dwell on general views of his goodness, let us consider it,

II. God's goodness **particularly**, as it manifests itself towards **us**, his redeemed people.

It is here more minutely delineated:

1. In reference to his **patience**.

God will "chide" his people for their sins; nor would he act worthy of himself, if he did not manifest his displeasure against the violations of his holy law, [Hebrews 12:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6-7). But we must all confess that he punishes neither too soon, nor too long, nor according to our deserts.

Not too soon; for then he would be "always chiding," seeing that we give continual occasion for his displeasure to arise. But he is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, [Psalm 130:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.3), well knowing that if he should contend with us for every fault, we could not answer him for one of a thousand! [Job 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.3).

Nor will he chide us long; if he hides his face, it is but for a little moment, [Isaiah 54:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-8), and if he wound us, it is, for the most part, but a very short time before he binds us up again and heals us, [Hosea 6:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.1-2). He will not be always angry, lest our spirits should faint, and fail by reason of his displeasure, [Isaiah 57:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.16).

Nor does he at any time deal with us according to our iniquities. Where must every one of us have been if he had entered into judgment with us according to the strict tenor of his law, Compare [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10) with [Psalm 143:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.2). Whatever trials we may have been called to endure, they have been infinitely less than our iniquities have deserved! [Job 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.6).

2. In reference to his **mercy**.

This has been boundless in its extent. Who can measure the vast expanse of Heaven? [Jeremiah 31:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.37). Yet such is the mercy of our God, having heights that cannot be explored, and depths that cannot be fathomed! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19). It reaches, not only to all his people, but to the utmost extent of their necessities or desires. It is also tender in its exercise. Can anything on earth afford us a stronger image of tenderness, than a parent striving to soothe the anguish of his agonizing infant? Yet such is the anxiety which God himself feels to heal our wounded spirits, and comfort us under all our conflicts, [Hosea 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8). [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20).

It is, moreover, lasting in its effects. Let a straight line be drawn from east to west; and the further it is drawn, the further shall the ends be removed from each other. Thus it is with respect to our sins which he has pardoned; they are put away from us to the remotest distance, never to meet upon our souls again, never to be remembered against us to all eternity! verse 17. [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19).

INFERENCES.

1. How base is it to sin against such a God!

Sin, of whatever kind, is really directed against him, [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4). And shall it appear a light matter to us to offend such a God? See this argument urged by Ezra, [Ezra 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.13-14), [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12); and let every temptation be repelled with this indignant expression: How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God! [Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9).

2. How ought we to fear and love our God!

It is twice observed in the text, that God's mercy is displayed "to those who fear him;" and it is manifested on purpose that he may be feared, [Psalm 130:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.4). Let us therefore not despise the riches of his goodness, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4), but improve them for the confirming of our fear, [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5), and the quickening of our love, [Psalm 116:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12); [Psalm 145:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.8-9); [Psalm 145:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.21).

#674

PERPETUITY OF GOD'S MERCY

**[Psalm 103:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.15-18)**

"As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's mercy 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."

The consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of human life is at all times seasonable. If indeed we had no hope beyond the grave, such a subject would be most gloomy and appalling; but when connected, as in the passage before us, with the unbounded mercy of our God, it is full of consolation to all who are looking forward to being with Christ in the eternal world. But we must have a good hope that we shall be partakers of God's mercy, or else not even the glorious description which is here given of it will divest death of its sting, or reconcile us to the thought of approaching dissolution. Let us then from these words consider,

I. The character of God's people.

In general terms they are represented as "fearing God." This of itself would be sufficient to distinguish them from all other people, more especially as it marks "the spirit of their minds." A humble sense of his presence, a dread of doing anything contrary to his will, and a filial desire to please him, universally distinguish his children. But still they are more clearly discerned by the characters assigned to them in our text:

1. They "keep God's covenant."

This is the covenant which was made with Abraham, [Galatians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16-17); and of which Christ is the surety; he has undertaken to accomplish everything for his believing people; to expiate their sins by his blood, and to renew their souls by his grace, "It is ordered in all things and sure! [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)."

This the believer sees to be exactly suited to his necessities, in that it provides everything for him, and only requires that he receive thankfully what is thus offered to him freely. This therefore he embraces, "He lays hold on it" as all his hope; and he relies upon it with his whole heart!

2. They "keep his commandments".

They are not negligent of good works, though they do not rely upon them for their justification before God. "They love God's law," which is written in their hearts; and they treasure up in their minds his precepts, no less than his promises. To obey the will of God, to do it universally without exception, and constantly without intermission, is the one desire of their hearts. They would gladly, if it were possible, "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God," being "holy, as God is holy," and "perfect, even as their Father in Heaven is perfect."

Such are the objects of God's love; but how shall we express,

II. The extent of his mercy towards his people.

The mercy of God is the great subject of this Psalm. In the foregoing verses it is set forth in a way of comparison; (equaling the boundless extent of Heaven!) but in the words before us it is declared in a way of contrast with the transitoriness of man's existence upon earth.

Every man's existence here on earth, is only as the flower of the field.

It was "but yesterday" that we grew up, and tomorrow "our place will no more be found." If allowed to continue for a while, we are only ripening for the sickle of the harvester; but a burning sun, or blasting wind, may cut short our existence in an hour! [James 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.10-11). And when once the flower of the grass is withered, all remembrance of it is gone. In the same way, it is with us; we look mirthful and flourish for a little moment; and then pass away, and give place to other generations.

But "the mercy of God towards his people is from everlasting to everlasting".

As to its origin, God's saving mercy existed from all eternity. Mercy is not excited in the bosom of our God by anything that he sees in man; neither the misery of our fallen state, nor any goodness which we may be supposed to manifest, move him to exercise a disposition that was not antecedently conceived in his own mind. Both his determination to exercise saving mercy, and the objects towards whom it should be exercised, were from all eternity fixed in his own bosom! [Ephesians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.11). [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). His people are chosen by him, not because they are holy, or will be holy—but that they "may be holy, and without blame before him in love! [Ephesians 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-6)." "He loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn them! [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3)."

As to its duration, God's saving mercy is also everlasting. "If he has begun a good work in them, we may be confident that he will carry it on! [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6). As, on the one hand, he will not depart from them; so, on the other hand, "he will put his fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from him! [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)." If at any time they transgress against him, he will chastise them with the rod, until he has brought them back to himself; but "he not utterly take his loving-kindness from them, [Psalm 89:30-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-36);" for "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable! [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)." In every age will he prove faithful to his promises, even to all eternity!

This doctrine is thought by many to encourage a presumptuous confidence, and a consequent neglect of holiness in life. But, if we only bear in mind the statement before given of the character of God's people, and our unequivocal declaration, that no person who does not answer to that character, can have any scriptural hope of mercy, we shall see, that there is no occasion for jealousy on that head. The holiness of man is secured by the irreversible decree of Heaven, that the end shall be combined with the means; and that every one whom God has ordained unto life, shall be "made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light."

We need not be afraid to give unto God all the glory of our salvation, and to ascribe all to the operation of his sovereign grace, since, whatever may be said of God's decrees, it is an infallible truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Let us **learn** from hence,

1. In what light we should view our present state of existence.

We should learn from nature, and from everything we see around us. Let all, and the young especially, look at the flower of the grass, and learn from that, how transient their life is! [Isaiah 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.6-8). And let none, like the rich fool in the Gospel, promise themselves years—when, for anything they know, this very night their souls may be required of them!

2. In what way we should improve our present state.

What have we to do, but to attain the character of God's people, and to secure the mercy which he will exercise towards them? In comparison with this, all earthly pursuits are vanity; since, as transient as our life is, we may yet find the objects of our fondest regard still more transient!

#675

THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD

**[Psalm 104:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 104.33-34)**

"I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation on him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord!"

It is well that we have in the Holy Scriptures a record of the experience of former saints; for, on the one hand, we would be inclined to rest in low attainments, if we did not know to what heights others had attained; and, on the other hand, we would be condemned for aiming at such exalted frames as were possessed by them, if we had not the sanction of their high authority.

However, whether the world is pleased or displeased, this, God helping me, shall be my resolution; and I recommend it to every one of you as your own, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being!"

From the words before us, we may learn,

I. What was the frame of David's mind.

1. It was a most **befitting** frame of mind.

Such was the frame of man when he came out of his Creator's hands; and such to this hour would it have continued, if he had not sinned. "Praise is lovely for the upright, [Psalm 147:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.1);" and "it well befits the just to be thankful." Such a state, as far as their nature will admit of it, befits every creature that God has formed. All the hosts of Heaven, and all the inhabitants of the earth, every creature in the universe, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, are distinctly called upon by the Psalmist, to present unto God, according to their capacity, their tribute of praise, [Psalm 148:1-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.1-13). And, if such a state befits them as creatures who are merely formed by God's hand, and supported by his care—then what should be our state, as redeemed by the blood of his only-begotten Son? Well may it be said, "Let them give thanks, whom the Lord has redeemed!"

2. It was a most **delightful** frame of mind.

We cannot conceive of David but as exquisitely happy when he penned these memorable words. Indeed he tells us elsewhere, how rich a source of happiness he found it to his soul, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips, [Psalm 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.5)." It is, in truth, the felicity of Heaven itself, where "they rest not day nor night, singing salvation to God and the Lamb forever and ever!"

3. It was a frame of mind which it is our bounden duty also to attain.

The commands of God to this effect are clear and positive, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice! [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4)." "Rejoice evermore! [1 Thessalonians 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.16)." Provision was made for the exercise of this grace under the Jewish dispensation; feasts were appointed expressly for it; and every member of each family was to rejoice before the Lord, the old and the young, the master and the servant, and even the stranger that happened to be sojourning among them, [Deuteronomy 16:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.13-15).

In the same way, ought not we who live under the more liberal dispensation of the Gospel, to rejoice? Methinks there should be no end of our joy; the resolution of David in the text should be ours; and we should be carrying it into effect all the day long! Nor should untoward circumstances of any kind rob us of our joy; but we should say with the Church of old, "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! [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18)."

Nor need we despair of resembling David; since he points out, in our text,

II. The way in which this joyful frame of mind may be attained.

As David attained it, so should we,

1. By **meditation**.

His "meditations on God were sweet," though in the Psalm before us, they related only to the creation and providence of God. But the minuteness with which he describes all these things clearly shows what delight he found in surveying every particular which might illustrate his subject.

What delight, then, should we feel in contemplating all the wonders of redemption! Of these there is no end. In meditating on these, we would soon be constrained to say, "How precious are your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you! [Psalm 139:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.17-18)." Let us, then, address ourselves to this holy employment. Let us say, with David, "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember your wonders of old. I will meditate also on all your work, and talk of your doings, [Psalm 77:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.11-12)."

2. By resolving to rest in nothing short of praising God.

We do well to say, 'I will fear the Lord;' and well to say, 'I will serve him.' But these are far below our duty. We should aspire after higher attainments than these; we should say, with David, "I will rejoice in the Lord!" 'I will never be satisfied, until I have such views of his excellency, and such a sense of his love, that I can rejoice in him, yes, until I can rejoice in him all the day!'

Most believers never attain this, because they do not aim at it. They are contented with lower acquirements; and hence they know but little of delight in God.

O beloved brethren! I would have "your hearts to be lifted up in the ways of the Lord." Why should any of you be strangers to this holy frame of mind? Why should you not "sing in the ways of the Lord," as others have done before you? I know, indeed, that you cannot of yourselves create these heavenly joys; but I know what God has said, "Those who seek the Lord shall praise him!" And if you set yourselves in earnest to enjoy him, you shall receive from him "the Spirit of adoption," whereby you shall be able to call him Father; and have "the witness of the Spirit," whereby you shall know that you are his children. Thus walking in the light of his countenance here, you shall have a pledge and a foretaste of your heavenly bliss!

APPLICATION.

I beseech you, brethren, do not live so far below your privileges as Christians in general are accustomed to live. How much happier might you be, if you lived near to God in the contemplation of his excellencies, and in the delightful exercise of prayer and praise! This should be the very bent of your mind from day to day, and it should continue to be so to the last hour of your life!

True, indeed, this cannot be expected, unless you embrace him and cleave unto him as your God. First learn to say to him, "O God, you are my God!" and then you will find no difficulty in adding, "Early I will seek you! [Psalm 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1)." Then will praise be, as it were, the natural language of your heart, and the continual employment of your lives! [Psalm 145:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-2); [Psalm 146:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.1-2).

Then in death, also, will your soul be joyful in your God; and "an abundant entrance will be ministered unto you into the realms of bliss," where, to all eternity, you shall know no other feeling than that of joy, no other language than that of praise!

#676

THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE

**[Psalm 106:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.4-5)**

"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!"

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—the Psalms exemplify the operations of genuine religion on the heart.

The words before us express the fervent desires of David's heart; and give occasion for observing that:

I. The lot of God's people is truly desirable.

God "bears a peculiar favor" towards them.

He esteems them as "his chosen," "his people," "his inheritance, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9);" and shows the same tender regard towards them as he did towards Israel of old: guiding, protecting, and even bearing them as on eagles' wings! [Deuteronomy 32:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9-13). [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9). Hence that blessing given them by Moses, a blessing applicable to them in every age and place, [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29).

He grants them to enjoy the truest "good".

The enemies of God often possess the greatest share of this world's goods, [Psalm 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.14); [Psalm 73:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.7); but his own people have that which is really good, [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2), and which shall endure when all sublunary things are come to an end, [Proverbs 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.18). He "visits them with salvation," which comprehends every solid good, whether for soul or body, whether for time or eternity!

He fills them with "gladness" and holy "glorying".

They are not indeed always joyful, because they have much, both within and without, which may well occasionally produce sorrow, [1 Peter 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6); but they have seasons of joy, and sometimes are enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8). Even in the midst of tribulations they can often glory, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3), and show to all around them, that they have supports and consolations which the world can neither give nor take away, [Psalm 94:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.19).

But what gladness and glorying will they have, when all grounds of sorrow shall be finally removed! [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.10); [Isaiah 60:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19-20).

Surely such a state is the most excellent on earth; and therefore,

II. To desire a participation in God's chosen people, is a laudable ambition.

The fervent petitions in the text were doubtless acceptable to God.

Every man naturally desires his own happiness; nor is this species of self-love ever wrong, except when it leads us to seek the end by improper means. When "salvation" is the object of our wishes, we cannot covet it too earnestly; God himself has taught us to pray for it, and to urge our petitions with an importunity that will take no denial, [Luke 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1). [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10). [Isaiah 45:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.11). And the answers which he gave to David, [Psalm 34:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.6); [Psalm 138:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.3). and others in the days of old, sufficiently evince that he is a prayer-hearing God, [Psalm 65:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.2), and that "he delights in the prayer of the upright, [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8)."

Nor can we please God more than by pleading with him after David's example.

There is nothing so great, but we may freely ask it at the hands of God. Nor is there anything so peculiar to the saints, but we may ask it as sinners, and be certain of obtaining it, provided we ask in humility and faith. Salvation especially, with all its attendant joys and blessings, he is ready to give unto all that call upon him. Let us then beg of him to impart it to us. And let us particularly bear in mind, that we must first be "visited with his salvation," before we can "see the good of his chosen people, and glory with his inheritance."

It is through the knowledge of Him, as our Savior and Redeemer, that we are to be made partakers of all other blessings. In vain do we hope to have fellowship with his people in their felicity, unless we first have fellowship with him in his salvation, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3).

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are grasping after this world.

All people are apt to think that this world can make them truly happy; but David and Solomon, who enjoyed all that the world could give them, found all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. Do not let us then follow the beaten track, but rather aspire after a good that never cloys, an inheritance that never fades! [1 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4).

2. To those who are sincerely, though faintly, pursuing the path assigned them.

We need not fear a disappointment on account of any unworthiness in ourselves. Let us beg of God to "remember us"—and he will remember us. Let us seek "his favor" in Christ Jesus, and he will be ever ready to grant it. Only let us prosecute this end steadily, and without wavering; so shall we attain the object of our desires, and glory with God's inheritance" forever and ever!

#677

THE EFFECTS WHICH NATIONAL MERCIES SHOULD PRODUCE ON US

**[Psalm 106:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.10-12)**

"He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived. Then they believed his promises and sang his praise!"

Gratitude for mercies received is a duty universally approved. Everyone sees the propriety of acknowledging personal obligations; nor is it less incumbent on us to be thankful for blessings conferred on us in our national capacity. The words before us record the conduct of the Israelites when a signal deliverance had been given to them; may we be as devoutly, and more abidingly impressed, while we consider:

I. The special mercy given unto the Israelites.

They had been in a state of extreme danger and distress.

After their departure from Egypt they encamped by the Red Sea; there they were hemmed in by impassable mountains and morasses. Pharaoh, greatly incensed, followed them with all his hosts, nor di he doubt but that he should speedily destroy them all. They, to all appearance, had no means either of escape or self-defense, and in this situation expected nothing but instant ruin.

But God had given them a most astonishing deliverance.

He prevented the nearer approach of Pharaoh by interposing a thick cloud between the Israelites and the Egyptians. He made a path across the sea, the waters standing as a wall on either side; he led his people through it as on dry land. Giving up Pharaoh to judicial blindness and obduracy, he allowed him, at the head of his army, to follow the hosts of Israel; but, when the Israelites were passed over, God let loose the waves upon their pursuers; thus in an instant were the Egyptian armies overwhelmed, and Israel saw their enemies dead upon the seashore! How wonderful was this interposition of God, and how great the obligation conferred by it!

Nor were they at the time insensible of the kindness manifested to them:

II. The effects produced by it.

They had showed themselves to be an ungrateful and unbelieving people. But now, for a season, they were greatly changed:

1. They believed God's Word.

They had had reason enough before to believe the promises made to them; Moses had confirmed his Word by many stupendous miracles; but they no sooner came into difficulty than they renewed their murmurs. Now, however, they were forced to confess the power and faithfulness of God, nor did they suppose that they should ever yield to unbelief again.

2. They sang God's praise.

The salvation afforded to them was inexpressibly great, and the hand of God in it was too visible to be overlooked; however therefore they might pity the individuals who perished, they could not but rejoice in their own safety, nor could they refrain from praising him who had wrought their deliverance; the most obdurate could not but feel; the most insensible could not but admire. Happy would it have been for them if they had always continued in this mind; but though, through frailty, they soon relinquished this heavenly temper—the effect, while it lasted, was good and suitable.

Improvement.

1. Let us endeavor to get our minds duly impressed with the **temporal** deliverances given to us as a nation.

We must be blind indeed if we see not the hand of God in the repeated victories which we have lately gained; though they have not been either so miraculous or so complete as that recorded in the text, they demand our most grateful acknowledgments. Had they been as numerous and decisive in favor of our enemies as they have been on our part, we would before this time have seen this land the theater of war. Let us then praise and adore our God for his interposition on our behalf; nor let us soon forget the wonders he has wrought for us; let us rather turn to him in a humble dependence on his mercy. Let us plead the promises he has made to all penitent and believing people; and let us, in faith and penitence, expect the accomplishment of his Word.

2. Let us take occasion also to bless him for the **spiritual** deliverance wrought for us as individuals.

Our danger from the broken law was far greater than from human foes; there was no possible method of escape, if God had not interposed for us; but he has opened a way for us through the death of his own Son, and utterly vanquished all the enemies of our salvation!

Let every heart and every tongue unite in his praise; nor let the remembrance of his mercy be ever effaced from our minds; but let his Word, whereby he encourages sinners, be our hope; then shall every fresh victory be a pledge of future triumphs, and the final destruction of our enemies be the subject of eternal praise!

#678

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF INGRATITUDE

**[Psalm 106:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.21-23)**

"They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt, miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. So he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them."

There is scarcely any sin more strongly reprobated in the Scripture than ingratitude! In the catalogue which the Apostle gives us of the crimes committed by the heathen world, unthankfulness to God is particularly specified as one of the most heinous and inexcusable, [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21). And the judgments denounced against one of the most eminent saints for a single instance of it, indisputably prove, how hateful it must be in the sight of God, 2 Chronicles 32:25. In improving the instance recorded in the text, we shall,

I. Consider the history referred to.

The history to which our text alludes is so well known, as not to need many words either to record or explain it. There were mercies given to the Israelites in Egypt, such as never had been experienced before from the foundation of the world. But they shortly forgot their almighty Deliverer, and worshiped a golden calf in his stead. This justly excited the indignation of God, and he determined to destroy them.

But Moses, having already fasted forty days and nights, fell down before God, and, during forty more days and nights, neither ate nor drank, but interceded on behalf of this rebellious people. God in answer to his intercession averted the stroke, and forbore to punish them according to their deserts, [Exodus 32:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.8-14).

II. Apply it to existing circumstances.

We need not recall to your minds what great things God has lately done for us also in Egypt. [This was the first fast-day after Lord Nelson's victory near the Nile, 1800.] Except in the history of the Jewish nation, there is scarcely any victory recorded in the annals of the world that was more glorious or complete than that given to us.

Yet how have we requited the Lord? At first, like the Jews, we were willing to give God the glory, and to sing his praise; but has not the impression worn off? And have we not shamefully "forgotten our Benefactor?" Well might God's anger wax hot against us, to consume us for such ingratitude. Nor can we ascribe it to anything but the intercessions of God's people that his wrath has not burst forth against us, as against Korah and his company, to destroy us utterly.

III. Deduce from it some suitable **observations**.

1. The duty of secret intercession.

We are commanded to pray for all men, and especially for kings and all that are in authority. Yes, even in Babylon, were the Jews taught to pray for the peace and prosperity of their very oppressors; how much more then should we intercede for our native country, where we enjoy every liberty that we can desire! Let it not be said, that our governors do not deserve our prayers; for the injunction to pray for kings was delivered in the reign of Nero, than whom a more wicked prince could not exist. Let us then make a conscience of this duty; for if we know not to intercede for others, we have no reason to think that we have ever yet seen aright the value of our own souls.

2. The benefit of public fasts.

The honor God has put upon public fasts is well known to all; and his answers to united supplications have been as signal as the hand of God could make them.

The victory given to 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),  
the respite to Nineveh, [Jonah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.10),  
and the deliverance to Peter the very day before his intended destruction, [Acts 12:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.5-8),  
all sufficiently evince that God will hear the united prayers of his people.

Indeed, if one man, Moses, so prevailed for the saving of a whole nation, what deliverance should not nations receive, if they would all unite in prayer! If a few individuals alone mourn for the land, they shall have at least some tokens of peculiar favor to themselves, though they should not succeed in averting God's anger from the nation at large, [Ezekiel 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.4); [Ezekiel 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.6). [Zephaniah 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.18). But if there are not some to stand in the breach; it cannot fail but that we must be overwhelmed, [Ezekiel 21:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 21.31-32). [Amos 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 6.1); [Amos 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 6.6).

3. The guilt and danger of neglecting Christ.

As great as were the mercies given to the Jews in Egypt, they are not to be compared with the redemption which we have experienced through Christ; as our bondage was infinitely more grievous, so the means used to effect our deliverance, infinitely enhance the value of the deliverance itself. We are bought with blood, and that blood was the blood of our incarnate God! What destruction then must not we expect if we should forget "God our Savior, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)." Nor is it the intercession of others that shall ever prevail to avert it from us; we must pray, every one of us for himself; not but that mutual intercession may in this respect be productive of great benefits. Let us then "bear his great goodness in remembrance," and let it be our song in time, as it shall be through all eternity.

#679

THE ZEAL OF PHINEHAS COMMENDED

**[Psalm 106:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.30)**

"But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked!"

[An Assize Sermon, at Cambridge, March 12, 1831, just after riotous combinations against agricultural machinery, together with most destructive incendiarism, which had prevailed in many parts of the country, were put down by a special commission at Winchester.]

To enter profitably into this subject, it will be necessary that I state in a few words, the history to which my text refers.

Balaam had been invited by Balak, King of Moab, to come and curse Israel, whose approach he dreaded, and whom he hoped by these means to subdue. Balaam, "coveting the wages of unrighteousness," thought to enrich himself by executing the wishes of the king of Moab; but was overruled by God to bless the very people whom he was hired to curse. Accordingly he was dismissed without the expected reward.

But with a view of obtaining the promised recompense, he struck out another way in which Balak might ultimately gain his end. He knew, that, if Israel could be ensnared to cast off their allegiance to God, they might lose his protection, and thus fall as an easy prey to their enemies. He advised therefore, that Balak should facilitate a connection between the Moabitish women and Israel; and thus draw the people of Israel into an illicit relationship with them.

And this once established, the Israelites would, in all probability, be led to attend the Moabitish women to their sacred feasts; and thus, by conforming to their habits, they would, in a short time, be seduced to a participation with them in their idolatrous rites.

In this advice, Balaam had but too well succeeded; and almost the whole of Israel were thus drawn into the sins of fornication and idolatry; to punish which, Jehovah had inflicted on them a plague, whereby no less than twenty-three thousand Israelites were slain. To avert the anger of the Most High, Moses issued an order that the judges of Israel should "slay all those who had joined themselves to Baal-Peor, the god of Moab, and hang them up before the Lord in the sun."

In this way, one thousand more were slain. Yet behold, while vengeance was thus being executed upon the offenders, a prince of one of the tribes brought a Midianite princess, in the very sight of Moses and of the whole congregation, to his tent, defying, as it were, the indignation both of God and man, and setting at nothing all regard even to common decency; and it was on this occasion that Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron the high-priest, rose up from his place, and followed them to their tent, and with his javelin pierced both of them through their bodies in the very act of sin; and thus, making, as it were, an atonement to the Divine justice, he prevailed with God to stop the plague!

Now this act of his being very highly commended in the Scriptures, and being replete with instruction proper to this occasion, I shall point out,

I. The importance of zeal in a general view.

II. The excellence of zeal as displayed in the history before us.

I. Zeal in itself may be either good or bad according to the object to which it is directed.

Hence the Apostle limits his commendation of it by this particular consideration, "It is good to be zealous, provided the purpose is good." If zeal is exercised in a bad cause, it only precipitates a person to the commission of greater evil. But, when put forth in the prosecution of a good object, zeal facilitates the attainment of the end proposed. Without zeal, nothing that is at all difficult can be accomplished. From whatever our indifference arises, it can never succeed in any arduous undertaking. If we are indolent in study, we can never make any great proficiency either in art or science. There may be, it is true, a brightness of genius which shall enable a person to shine among his fellows without much labor; but he will be altogether superficial in his knowledge, and will soon betray his lack of diligence by the slenderness of his attainments.

The same will be found true in every department of life. It is "the diligent hand alone, that makes rich." It is not always found indeed that labor, however great, is crowned with success; but where eminence in any arduous pursuit is attained, we may be sure that great zeal has been exercised in the prosecution of it. Who ever enlightened the world with discoveries in science, without having first devoted much time to study, and labored hard for the furnishing and enriching of his own mind? Even success in attainments of a lower order is not gained without much previous exertion in that particular line in which the effort is made.

In the Grecian games, for instance, a long course of self-denying labor was necessary to enable any man to rise above his competitors, and to secure the distinction at which he aimed. So in everything, if a man would either benefit others, or distinguish himself—he must put forth zeal in the prosecution of the end which he has in view.

Had Phinehas not felt more deeply than others the dishonor done to God, and stirred himself more resolutely to avenge his cause, he would have neither turned away God's wrath from Israel, nor obtained for himself the commendation given him. It was his zeal for God that put him forth beyond all others, and that has rendered him an example to mankind to the remotest ages of the world.

This zeal of his forms the chief subject of our present discourse, and therefore we shall point out,

II. The excellence of zeal as displayed in the history before us.

To view his conduct aright, we must consider him as performing a magisterial act of piety towards man, and a ministerial act of piety towards God; in both which points of view it is highly commended to us by God himself.

See the zeal of Phinehas as **a magisterial act of justice towards man**.

Magistrates are appointed by Almighty God as his vice-regents in the government of the world. They are set over their fellow-creatures for the preservation of order, to give protection to the peaceable, and to punish those who, by any evil deeds, would interrupt the welfare of the community. They are to exercise authority for him; being his ministers for good to the people over whom they are placed; nor are they to bear the sword in vain, but to be "revengers in his name to execute wrath upon him who does evil, [Romans 13:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-4)."

Now it is obvious that when iniquity abounds, and is sanctioned and upheld, not only by the multitude, but by people of distinction and power—then it is no easy matter for a magistrate to discharge his duty aright. On the one hand, he is afraid of appearing singular, and of having his interposition ascribed to unworthy motives; and, on the other hand, he is apprehensive that he shall fail in his efforts to withstand the evils which he deplores. He sees others, perhaps, as willing as himself to lament the reigning corruption, but not willing to incur the odium of standing forth as reformers, and of exerting their power for the correction of it. He knows how much more ready all will be to blame his zeal, than to commend it; and therefore he is disposed rather to wait until he can find others to cooperate with him, than by extraordinary and unaided efforts to put to shame those who draw back from their duty, and are destitute of that zeal which he feels it incumbent on him to employ. This was the state of Phinehas. He was but a young man, and therefore might be condemned as meddlesome and obtrusive.

The offenders too were people of the highest rank in the nations to which they belonged; and the elder rulers, who, together with him, were witnesses of this horrible impiety, were all either intimidated or stupefied; so that not one of them felt disposed to avenge the cause of Israel and of God on these flagrant transgressors.

But Phinehas would not wait for others. He would discharge his duty at all events; and whatever others might either say or do, Phinehas would approve himself to God as an active magistrate, and a conscientious servant of the Most High.

That he did not go forth as one who was not authorized to execute the laws, is evident from the commendation given to him both by God and man; and therefore he stands as a pattern for all magistrates to discharge their official duties manfully, without favor and without fear.

What a blessing such magistrates are to any land, may be seen in the benefits which, by that one act, Phinehas obtained for the whole nation of Israel! On his executing of judgment, the plague was stayed. Twenty-four thousand, in the whole, had perished in one day; and, had he delayed to discharge his duty in this matter until his brethren in office should join him, no one can tell how many thousands more would have fallen a sacrifice to the wrath of God. But by this act of his he "made atonement for the children of Israel," and "averted God's wrath from them." He arrested also the progress of iniquity; and obtained for himself the highest honors, even "the covenant of an everlasting priesthood;" and "this act of his was counted to him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore, verse 31."

We are not to suppose that this act formed his justifying righteousness before God; for not all the obedience of the best of men could ever avail for that; but it proved to all future generations that he was a righteous man, and that no consideration under Heaven could deter him from a faithful discharge of his duties, whether to God or man.

Now such a blessing are conscientious magistrates in every age and in every land; and they who boldly maintain the authority of the laws, however they may be traduced and calumniated for a season, are, indeed, the most honorable members of society, and, sooner or later, will receive the approbation of every considerate man.

The obligations we owe to such are, at this moment, seen and felt through the land, in the suppression of outrage, and in the diminution of the terrors diffused through the whole country by reckless and desperate incendiaries. And I cannot but hope that the firmness manifested both by the civil and legal powers in our sister isle, will be attended with a similar blessing from the Most High. It is right, it is necessary, that law should rule; and, if it cannot be upheld, but by the exercise of severity towards those who would trample it under their feet, it is right that those who break the law should be made victims of their own folly and wickedness. I say again, the law must rule; and neither the many nor the great are to set it aside. And if in the suppression of evil somewhat of laxity prevailed among us for a season, that time is past, and shall not readily, I hope, return again. The whole people of the land, though but too easily wrought upon by factious demagogues, are yet in their cooler moments united firmly in this one sentiment, that, if not even the King himself can rule but according to law, neither factious demagogues, nor an excited populace, are to be allowed to rule contrary to law. This is acknowledged now through all the grades of society; and, I trust, will ever be maintained among us by those whose office it is, whether as magistrates or jurors, to administer justice, and to uphold and execute the laws.

I observed that this zeal of Phinehas may also be considered as **a ministerial act of piety towards God**.

In this light it is placed by God himself, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites! [Numbers 25:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 25.11-13)." He was the presumptive heir to the high-priesthood; and with his own hand he here offered an atonement to his offended God, for whose honor he was deeply interested, and whose wrath he labored to avert. In this so far as his zeal for God's honor was concerned—he is a pattern for ministers in all future ages. As to the act itself, that was peculiar to the situation and circumstances in which he stood; nor is any man now authorized to follow his example. Not even the King is at liberty to take the law into his own hand, and to execute its sentence in the summary way that he did. Everything now must be transacted through a legal process, and by officers specially appointed to that end.

But the same zeal as animated the soul of Phinehas, should glow in the bosom of every minister of Christ! The aboundings of iniquity should occasion "great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart" in all who serve in God's sanctuary; yes, "rivers of tears should run down their eyes night and day" because of the dishonor which is done to God by a wicked and rebellious world.

But to exercise a befitting zeal for God is no easy matter; and any person standing forth, as Phinehas, to stem the torrent of wickedness which flows around him, will be exposed to much obloquy as being a fanatical enthusiast. In every age such ministers have "been for signs and for wonders" in the Church of God.

At the time of the deluge we hear of but one person, Noah, who dared to enter his protest against the impiety of the world around him.

In Elijah's time, though there were seven thousand who were not addicted to the reigning sin, there was but one who openly declaimed against it.

And so it is now. There are surely many thousands of people in the land, both of ministers and people, who withstand in secret the corruptions of the world; but yet any man, who, like Phinehas, should stand up with becoming zeal to arrest the progress of iniquity, would be accounted "a troubler of our Israel," and be condemned for his needless, his insufferable, preciseness. But whence is this? It is owing to the lukewarmness of the generality, and not to any undue zeal in those who serve the Lord. Of all people under Heaven, a minister of Christ is most bound to exert himself in the cause of his Divine Master. Ministers are intended to be "lights in a dark world;" yes, they are "the salt of the earth," which, by its influence, is destined to keep the whole world from corruption. Nor ought any consideration either of hope or of fear to sway them in the least. They should be unmoved by seductions of any kind, and should be ready to lay down their own lives for the honor of God, and the welfare of their fellow-creatures. Yes, this is the sacrifice which they should be ready to make; for so says the holy Apostle, "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me! [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18)." Here the Apostle considers his converts as an offering to God; and, as libations were poured forth upon the offerings, he accounted his heart's blood as a proper libation to be poured forth for them; and the shedding of it an occasion for most unqualified joy.

For the averting of God's wrath, it is true, we can offer no atonement. But we can speak of an atonement which has been offered, even that once offered by our blessed Lord upon the cross; and that is a sufficient "atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world." But how shall I speak of that? If we admire the zeal of Phinehas, who offered to God an atonement by the sacrifice of the offenders, what shall I say of our great High-Priest, who has made an atonement by the sacrifice of himself, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God? Here was zeal indeed, and "a love that surpasses knowledge." Only by Christ's sin-atoning sacrifice, is that God is pacified towards us. There is, alas! a moral plague prevailing throughout our whole camp, and slaying its tens of thousands in a day. But by means of this atonement, we are empowered both to arrest its progress, and to take away its guilt.

And need I say, that such ministers are a blessing in the land? Truly they are a blessing, and shall be accounted so as long as the world shall stand. What if, like Phinehas, they overstep the bounds observed by their more lukewarm fellows? They shall, like him, be honored both by God and man; while the memory of less faithful ministers shall pass away into oblivion, like a morning cloud. Their zeal shall be counted to them for righteousness to the last ages; not for their justifying righteousness, as I have before observed; for in Christ alone can that righteousness be found, and from him it must be received by faith alone; but, as an evidence of their piety, it shall be counted to them, and be a ground of praise and thanksgiving to God among all who shall be called to imitate their bright example.

What then do I look for on this occasion? I call for zeal, even for the zeal of Phinehas, in all the magistrates, and in all the ministers, of our land! In Phinehas these offices were united; as in some instances they are among ourselves; though I think, for the most part, unhappily and unwisely. A minister, instead of affecting a double occupation, should rather say, with our blessed Lord, "Who made me a ruler and a judge over you?" And I am sure that,if a minister will give himself entirely to his own proper work, he will find enough to occupy all his time and all his thoughts.

The offices of the magistracy and the ministry are perfectly distinct. Magistrates have to uphold and enforce the laws of man; ministers have to propagate the glorious gospel of the blessed God. The office of the magistrate has respect to the temporal welfare of mankind; the office of a minister is to promote, in every possible way, their spiritual and eternal interests.

Still, however, there should be in both a cordial and energetic cooperation for the honor of God, and for the good of man. A minister often needs the support of magisterial authority, and should find it promptly exerted for him when occasion requires. On the other hand, the magistrate, whose office is rather for the suppression of evil than the inculcation of good, needs the aid of ministers, for the effecting of an entire change in the opinions and habits of the community.

Let each, therefore, be found in the faithful discharge of their respective duties; so may we hope that God's wrath shall be averted from our guilty land, and that his covenant blessings shall be poured forth upon us through eternal ages.

I cannot close my subject without briefly observing, thatwe all have within the camp of our own hearts many corruptions, which have provoked the displeasure of the Most High, and which need to be sought out, and prosecuted, and slain! O that there were in all of us a holy zeal in reference to them, and that we would sacrifice them to God with an unsparing hand!

"Those who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires! *[Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24)*." Can we appeal to God that this is our character? Do our lives bear witness to us, that while the great mass of the community care for nothing beyond the pleasures, the riches, the honors, of the world; and those who should stand forth as champions for God, are lukewarm and timid in his sacred cause, we dare to be singular, and firm and zealous in the discharge of our respective duties, and, above all, in the devotion of our souls to God? Truly we should all, if I may so express myself, begin at home!

God has at this moment a controversy with the whole nation. And, though magistrates and ministers may do much to correct the abuses which prevail in external matters, that will be of little avail to pacify our offended God.

God looks at the heart. That must be humbled for our past iniquities, and purged from the allowed indulgence of any sin. Yes, the heart must be consecrated to God, with all its faculties and all its powers; it must first be cleansed in the blood of Christ, and then be sanctified by his Spirit. Then shall the chastising hand of God be removed from us, in our individual capacity at least, if not collectively as a nation; and, at all events, his eternal judgments shall be averted from us, and all the blessings of his covenant be our everlasting portion.

This is the plague which, after all, we are most interested in removing, even "the plague of our own hearts!" This once removed by faith in the Lord Jesus, and by the influences of his Spirit, we shall have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and stand accepted of our God forever and ever!

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PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS MERCIES

**[Psalm 106:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.48)**

"Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD!"

We find in the world almost a universal prejudice against the Christian religion, as a source of melancholy. And more especially if the wickedness of man is portrayed in very deep colors, it is supposed that we shall drive all our hearers to despair. But where shall we find the sins of Israel more awfully depicted, than in the Psalm before us? Yet, how is it closed? With weepings and with wailings? No; but with as devout an ascription of praise as is to be found in all the inspired volume.

The truth is, that nothing so elevates the soul as a contrasted view of God's mercies and our own vileness. No man will build so high a superstructure of praise, as he who digs deepest into the corruptions of his own heart, and lays his foundation broadest on God's sovereign grace in the gospel of Christ! Behold, then, I beg you,

I. The ebullition of heart here manifested!

What is it that the Psalmist has been contemplating?

He give us in this Psalm, an epitome of the conduct of all Israel, from the time of their coming out of Egypt to the time of David. See 1 Chronicles 16:35-36. He mentions:  
their provoking of God at the Red Sea,  
their lusting after sensual gratifications,  
their mutinying against God's vice-regents,  
their worshiping of the molten calf,  
their contempt of the Promised Land,  
their joining with the Moabites and Midianites in the worship of Baal-peor,  
their quarreling with Moses at Kadesh;  
and, finally, their incorporating themselves with the Canaanites, and imitating their idolatrous and cruel customs!

But together with all this, he shows how graciously God had dealt with them; for though he had inflicted many and sore judgments upon them—he had not yet finally forsaken them; but, for his own name sake, and for the sake of the covenant which he had made with them, he still continued to them his tender mercies.

And was not all this a ground for praise and thanksgiving?

Methinks it was not possible for anyone who duly considered the subjects here brought before him, to feel otherwise than as the Psalmist himself felt on the occasion. For, had God taken them in this manner from the midst of another nation, and multiplied his mercies to them to such an extent, and for so many hundreds of years, in the midst of all their rebellions; and shall they not "bless him?"

Had he so shown himself both "the God of Israel" and "a God to Israel;" and shall they not adore him?

Shall they not desire that all should be alike impressed with a sense of these mercies, and that God should be alike glorified in all and by all?

Methinks, when it was said, "Let all the people say, Amen!" that there was not one dissentient or silent voice in the midst of them. Indeed, we are expressly told that "they all said, Amen! and praised the Lord." And, if there had been one who refused to unite in this tribute of praise, he might well have been separated from the congregation, as a curse to the Church, and as unworthy to be numbered among the Lord's people.

From hence, then, we may clearly see,

II. The corresponding feeling which it should generate in **us**.

We have experienced an infinitely greater redemption than they!

Their redemption was from temporal bondage, which, at all events, must have been before long terminated by death.

Our redemption is from the chains of sin and Satan, death and Hell.

Their redemption was by power only.

Our redemption is by price as well as power, even by the inestimable price of our Redeemer's blood! [1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19).

And, notwithstanding this, we have been as rebellious as ever they were!

Were our sins noted in a book, as theirs are, we would be found to have been as perverse and obstinate as they. In truth, their history is a mirror, wherein the countenance of the whole Christian world shines as clearly as the sun at noon-day. They are the very prototype, to which we are perfectly conformed; yes, and with incomparably greater guilt than they, inasmuch as our obligations to God are infinitely greater than theirs.

Yet God is more merciful to us than ever he was to them.

True, he has at times visited us with judgments; but he has never cast us off, or "shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure." On the contrary, he still follows us with offers of mercy through his beloved Son, and importunes us to accept of reconciliation with him through the blood that was shed for us upon the cross.

What, then, should be our sense of gratitude towards him!

If the Israelites were called to bless him as "the God of Israel," how much more should we bless him as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and our God and Father in him!

If they were called to bless him in a review of his conduct towards them, how much more may we, in reference to his conduct towards us!

If everyone of the people was to utter his "Amen" at the giving of thanks to God—then what shall be said of us, if there be one among us who shall show reluctance to unite in this holy exercise? Methinks "the very stones would cry out against him."

To every one of you, then, I say with confidence, bear your part with us; and when we say, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting!" then let every one of you, without exception, "say, Amen, Amen, Amen!" yes, with one heart and one voice, I say to all, without exception, "Praise the Lord!"

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are not yet liberated from their bondage.

Such there were in the days of Saul and of David, who were in captivity among the heathen. And how would it be possible for them to unite with their brethren in Jerusalem in these songs of praise? "How could they sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Hence they pray, "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto your name, and to triumph in your praise! verse 47." The same prayer I recommend to you. I know you cannot rise to this devout and holy frame while you are under bondage to guilt and fear and evil habits; it is impossible you should. But, if once you obtain reconciliation with God, and, "by a spirit of adoption, are enabled to call him Father"—then will your mouth be opened to sing his praise; and you will desire that every man should join with you in that blessed employment.

2. Those who have been brought into "the liberty of the children of God".

To you this song of praise is nothing more than the prevailing expression of your feelings before God. To bless and magnify your God, is the joy of your soul; and you are ready to obey the call, when God's ministers invite you to unite in that holy exercise.

Behold, then, I now say, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel! and let every one of you say, Amen!" Say it, then; say it cordially; say it devoutly.

We are told, that when the Christians of the primitive Churches said Amen, so general and so earnest was the utterance given to that word, that the sound was like thunder. I will not pretend to say what their circumstances might call for; nor will I sit in judgment upon those of whom I know so little. But at this day, I confess, I should prefer a more quiet expression of our feelings and our desires. I am not fond of vociferation in prayer; nor do I like a noisy piety. I prefer what is intimated in that delicate expression of the Psalmist, "Praise is silent before you, O Lord, [Psalm 65:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 65.1)." But let God hear "your breathing and your cry [Lamentations 3:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.56);" and doubt not but that He will accept it at your hands; and, by the efforts which you make to praise him now, will he prepare you to join in everlasting "Hallelujahs" in the realms above!

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PRAISE TO GOD FOR REDEMPTION

**[Psalm 107:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.1-3)**

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south."

The intent of this Psalm appears to be, not merely to display the providence of God as interposing in all the concerns of men, but especially the goodness of God in vouchsafing to hear the prayers of men, and to grant them deliverance in answer to their supplications. This is illustrated under a variety of interesting images. His interpositions are described in behalf:  
of travelers lost, but conducted home in safety;  
of prisoners, rescued from merited captivity;  
of people sick and dying, restored to health;  
of mariners preserved, and brought to their desired haven.

But we must not confine our attention to temporal deliverances only; for it is manifest in the very commencement of the Psalm that respect is had to the goodness and mercy of God in their most extended operations, and especially in the great work of redemption; for it is "from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south," that he has already gathered his redeemed people! [Matthew 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.11), and that he will yet gather them into the kingdom of his Messiah! [Isaiah 43:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.5-6); [Isaiah 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.8), even "Shiloh, unto whom shall the gathering of the people be, [Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.10)."

In considering the different images, we might notice both the temporal and spiritual deliverances which they severally refer to; but at present we shall wave all reference to them, and notice only the great work of redemption, as set forth in the words before us; wherein we see,

I. The duty of all to give thanks to God.

Consider,

1. The **grounds** of our duty to praise God.

Wherever we turn our eyes, we cannot but see that "the Lord is good."

Survey the heavenly bodies, and contemplate the benefits derived from them!

View the earth with its innumerable productions for the good of man; examine your corporeal frame, and think how every part performs its office for the benefit of the whole.

Above all, reflect on the abilities and faculties of our immortal souls, and mark how by them we are elevated above all the rest of the creation, and fitted for an infinitely higher state of existence in the presence of our God; and then say whether we have not reason to proclaim the goodness of our God!

But the "mercy" of our God is yet, if possible, a more stupendous object of admiration; because God's goodness manifested itself to us in innocence; whereas God's mercy is exercised towards us under an inconceivable load of guilt!

Think how God's mercy was displayed to man at first, in promising him a Savior.

Think how God's mercy wrought in due time, in sending that Savior into the world, even the eternal Son of God, and in laying all our iniquities on him.

Think how God's mercy has shown itself to the converted among us, in bearing with all our iniquities, and in following us with offers of a free and full salvation. Think how God's mercy towards all who embrace its gracious offers.

Surely if our minds were affected as they ought to be with this wonderful subject, we should never cease to praise and adore our wondrous God!

2. The duty of praising God, itself.

"O give thanks unto the Lord" for these things, all of you, old and young, rich and poor, one with another! If there are one among us that has not participated in these benefits, we will be content that he shall be silent; but the very circumstance that we are still on mercy's ground is abundant evidence that we have reason to join in one universal song of praise and thanksgiving.

Think of the fallen angels, who never had a Savior provided for them!

Think of the millions of the human race who never heard of the Savior that has been provided for them; or that, having heard of him, have been left to perish in a neglect of his salvation.

Think of these things, and then, if you can, deny your obligations to the goodness and mercy of your God.

But let us more especially consider,

II. The peculiar obligations of the redeemed to praise God.

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so;" yes, if you "whom he has delivered out of the hand of the enemy, and gathered to himself," are silent, "the very stones will cry out against you."

1. Think from whence you have been gathered.

The remotest ends of the earth are not so far from each other, as you were from God; and in this state you were led captive by the devil at his will.

2. Think by what means you were redeemed.

It was by the precious blood of God's only dear Son, [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13); It was also by the effectual working of his power; for he, as a good Shepherd, sought you out, and apprehended you, and brought you home on his shoulders rejoicing! [Ezekiel 34:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.12). [Luke 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.5).

3. Think to what you are brought.

As the Lord's redeemed people, you are brought into a state of peace with God:  
you have the privilege of constant communion with him;  
you may expect at his hands every blessing which your souls can desire;  
and you shall finally posses all the glory and felicity of Heaven!

Think now what, in the view of these things, should be the state of your minds. If those who have never yet experienced one of these benefits, have yet abundant reason to celebrate the goodness and mercy of their God, have not you much more? O "let the redeemed of the Lord say so;" let them sing his praises day and night; let them adore him with their whole hearts!

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are yet insensible of God's goodness.

Alas! how great a portion of every church assembly are comprehended under this description! Well, know then that we require no other proof of your perishing condition. Tell us not from what sins you are free; we will grant all that you are pleased to say; but we declare you to be blind, ignorant, base, ungrateful creatures; you have no hearts to adore your God; and therefore if you die in your present state—you can never enter into the kingdom of Heaven, where the one employment of the blessed inhabitants is to sing the praises of redeeming love. If ever you are truly converted unto God, this new song will be put into your mouths, and be sung by you day and night! [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3) with [Jeremiah 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 33.11).

2. Those who love God's salvation.

Some there are, and may God increase their number a hundredfold! who delight to bless and praise their God; Go on then, dearly Beloved, and abound more and more. Though your songs are as yet but faint, they are truly pleasing in the ears of your reconciled God and Father. This song in particular is grateful to him. Mark what notice he took of it when sung by Solomon, [2 Chronicles 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 5.13); So will he come down and fill your souls with his glory. Mark also what honor he put upon it when sung by Jehoshaphat, [2 Chronicles 20:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.21-22); So will he defeat all the confederacies, whether of earth or Hell, that may be formed against you. Sing on then with increasing gratitude, even to the end; and soon shall the golden harp be put into your hands, and you shall join with that heavenly choir in that more perfect song in which they all unite, even in singing. "Salvation to God and to the Lamb forever and ever!"

#682

THE DUTY AND GROUNDS OF PRAISE

**[Psalm 107:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.8-9)**

"Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things!"

Among the various graces which characterize the true Christian, that of gratitude to God is very conspicuous. Others indeed will confess their obligations to the Supreme Being; but none are duly sensible of them, until they have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. When once we have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," and been impressed with a sense of redeeming love, we shall view the goodness of God in all his dispensations; and not only glorify him ourselves, but earnestly desire that all should render him the honor due unto his name.

This disposition was eminently displayed in David, when he penned the Psalm before us. No less than four times does he repeat the fervent wish, that men would praise the Lord; and at each time does he suggest the most ample grounds for the performance of that duty.

From David's words we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The duty here recommended.

Wherever a superior being is acknowledged, there a tribute of prayer and praise is considered as due to him. The light of scripture revelation confirms this general sentiment; and expressly inculcates thanksgiving to God as a universal duty. The manner in which the Psalmist urges us to praise our heavenly Benefactor, deserves peculiar attention; it speaks more forcibly than the strongest injunction could have done; and intimates that:

1. Praise is **an indispensable duty**.

Praise is the external expression, whereby a soul, filled with admiration and gratitude, gives vent to its feelings towards its heavenly Benefactor. It is an exercise of which the glorified saints and angels are never weary! [Revelation 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 4.8-9); and in which we enjoy a foretaste of Heaven itself, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8). Words can scarcely convey a more sublime idea of this employment, than those by which David describes its effects upon the soul, [Psalm 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.5). In this view he strongly recommends praise to us, and we may also recommend praise to each other, as "good, pleasant, and lovely [Psalm 147:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.1)."

Praise is a duty which we owe to God. There is not any precept in the Bible more plain than those which relate to praising God, [1 Thessalonians 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.18). [Ephesians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.20); There is not any Christian duty, the neglect of which is represented in a more heinous light. Lack of praise is the strongest mark of an ungodly state, [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21); and a certain ground of eternal condemnation! [Deuteronomy 28:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.45); [Deuteronomy 28:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.47).

On the other hand, there is not any religious act of which more honorable mention is made than this! Praise glorifies God, [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.23). There is not any religious act to which, if accompanied by a suitable deportment, more exalted privileges are annexed. [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.23).

Hence it is, that thirteen times in the space of six short verses, David renews his exhortations to every living creature to praise the Lord! Psalm 150.

2. Praise is **a much neglected duty**.

Whatever blessings men enjoy, they rest in the gift, and forget the Giver. In fact, we scarcely know the value of our blessings until we are bereaved of them. The generality of men, instead of acknowledging with gratitude God's kindness towards them, and requiting him according to the benefits he has given to them, take occasion from his mercies to sin the more against him! Not even the godly themselves abound in this holy employment as we might expect. Many, alas! live at so great a distance from God, that they can scarcely ever rise above a petition for mercy, or, at most, a sense of thankfulness that he has not utterly cast them off. They cannot soar to a contemplation of the divine perfections, or of the excellency of Christ, or of the blessedness of those mansions that are prepared for them.

They have so much of the world in their hearts, and so little faith, that they cannot realize their principles, or glorify God in any measure as they ought.

Instead of cultivating the devout spirit of David, [Psalm 63:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3-4); [Psalm 119:164](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.164), they rest satisfied in a lukewarm state, saying, "It is too high; I cannot attain unto it, [Psalm 139:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.6)."

Yes, though there are some who delight themselves in God; yet, in reference to the greater part even of real Christians we must say with sorrow and regret, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and according to his excellent greatness! [Psalm 150:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 150.2)."

To stir up ourselves to a due performance of this duty, let us consider,

II. The grounds proposed for the performance of praise.

There is nothing that may not in some view or other be made a ground of praise and thanksgiving. In the text we are led to notice,

1. Those things which are general.

The goodness of God, as manifested in the wonderful dispensations of his providence, is that which first offers itself to our consideration. How bountifully does God supply the returning needs of his creatures, even while they are continuing in rebellion against him! How marvelously has he preserved us in life from our earliest infancy to this day; and kept in tune, as it were, in the midst of continual shocks and dangers—an instrument of ten thousand strings!

With what kindness has he restrained the evil dispositions of men, which, if allowed to rage without control, would produce a very Hell upon earth In proof of this we need only look back to the slaughters and massacres, the rapes and ravages, and all the other horrors of the French Revolution.

As for the godly, they would soon be extirpated from the face of the earth, if the sons of Belial were permitted to execute all that is in their hearts! And who among us would not have perpetrated many more evils than he has, if God had not imposed an invisible restraint upon him, and diverted him from his purpose! See the instances of Abimelech, [Genesis 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 20.6); of Laban, [Genesis 31:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 31.24); of David, [1 Samuel 25:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.32-34).

We must particularly call to mind the wonders God has wrought for us, in preserving us from domestic tumults and foreign invasions; and in making us victorious, when our allies have been all subdued, or have even combined against us with the common enemy for our destruction. In a more especial manner should we admire the goodness of God in so suddenly disposing the hearts of our enemies to peace, and in bringing the calamities both of war and scarcity to a happy termination.

The riches of God's grace are also deserving of the deepest attention. Surely it is not possible to overlook the wonderful work of redemption which God has wrought for sinful man.

What shall I say of the gift of his only-begotten Son to die for sinners?

What of the gift of his Holy Spirit to instruct and sanctify us?

What of all the promises of grace and mercy and peace to the believing soul?

And what of that eternal inheritance he has prepared for us in Heaven?

Truly he dealt not so with the fallen angels; but to "the children of men" he has communicated richer blessings than words can declare, or that any finite imagination can conceive. And should we not praise him for these? If we are silent on subjects like these, truly our mouths will be shut in the day that our ingratitude shall be punished by our indignant God.

2. Those things which are more particularly specified as given to "the longing and hungry soul".

Under the image of a weary traveler rescued from the deepest distress, and brought beyond all expectation to the rest he had desired, the Psalmist represents a soul hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and raised from a state of despondency to the full enjoyment of its God.

There are thousands who are reduced to great perplexity in the pursuit of Heaven. They feel their guilty and perishing condition; but how to extricate themselves from the wilderness of this world, and to find their way to the city of habitation, they know not. Having tried in vain those self-righteous methods of escape which their own reason has suggested—they cry at last to God, and implore his guidance. He, ever ready to hear the prayer of the poor destitute sinner, "reveals his dear Son in their hearts;" he shows them that in Christ is their hope, in Christ is their refuge, in Christ is their security.

Being thus led to Christ, their "longing souls are satisfied, their hungry souls are filled with goodness!" Who can conceive what satisfaction a soul feels, when Christ is thus revealed to it as "the way, the truth, and the life!"

I wish you particularly to notice how God marks with approbation not our attainments only, but our very desires. Longing and hungering after God are the very lowest operations and effects of grace in the soul; yet does God delight in them, and magnify his mercy towards those in whom even these slight beginnings of what is good are seen.

And is not this a ground of praise? If any who have experienced such mercies "should hold their peace," methinks Sodom and Gomorrah will rise up in judgment against them. The more we contemplate redeeming love, the more will a sacred ardor glow within our bosoms to bless and praise the Lord for his wondrous salvation! verse 43.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who never praise God at all.

What enemies are such people both to their present and future happiness! How much richer enjoyment would they now have of all God's mercies, if they could discern his hand in them, and taste his love! And how much happier would they be in the eternal world! for, can it be supposed that God will bestow Heaven indiscriminately on the evil and unthankful, together with the good and thankful? Can it be thought that a man who was more insensible of favors than an ox or a donkey, [Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.3), shall instantly on his dismissal from the body begin to adore his God, and to join in those celestial anthems for which he had not the smallest taste?

No! We must begin on earth the work we are to carry on in Heaven; nor can we hope to participate in the felicity of the saints, if we have not first cultivated their disposition, and found delight in their employment.

2. Those who desire and endeavor to praise him.

While some find their hearts enlarged in praising God, we trust there are many who say, O that I could praise the Lord for his goodness! But whence is it that, with a desire to enjoy God, so many spend their days in sighing and mourning instead of in joy and rejoicing?

Perhaps they pore over their own corruptions without contemplating the divine attributes.

They look at themselves, more than at Christ.

They consider their own needs; but overlook the Lord's promises.

They anticipate future difficulties, without adverting to past deliverances.

In short, they cannot praise God as they would wish, because they are forgetful of those benefits which are the occasions and grounds of praise. Let all such people then be aware of their error. Let them begin this day the important, the delightful, the long-neglected work. Let them unite in praising God for his mercies, whether public or personal, whether temporal or eternal.

To all would we say, in the energetic language of the Psalmist, "O sing praises unto the Lord, sing praises; sing praises unto the Lord, sing praises; sing praises with understanding! [Psalm 47:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 47.6-7)." "Let young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and heavens! [Psalm 148:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.12-13)."

#683

GOD'S LOVE SEEN IN ALL HIS DISPENSATIONS

**[Psalm 107:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.43)**

"Whoever is wise, let him give attention to these things and consider the great love of the LORD!"

To know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, is the highest privilege and perfection of man! This attainment, infinitely beyond all others, constitutes true wisdom. But to acquire this knowledge, it is necessary that we study well, not only Scripture, but also the records of God's providential dealings with mankind. The Word and works of God mutually reflect light on each other; and the more extensive and accurate our observation is of those things which occur from day to day, the more just will be our apprehension of God's nature and perfections.

True indeed it is, that as far as theory is concerned, we may learn everything from the Scripture alone; for in the world and in the Church we can find only a repetition of those things which are recorded in the Sacred Volume; but a practical sense of God's love is greatly furthered by the constant exhibition of it which may be seen in his dealings with us; so that we may well say with the Psalmist, "Whoever is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

We propose to show,

I. What those things are which are here presented to our notice.

To enter fully into them, we should distinctly consider the different representations which are here given of God's merciful interposition in behalf of:  
bewildered travelers, verse 4  
incarcerated prisoners, verse 10  
dying invalids, verse 17 and  
mariners reduced to the lowest ebb of despondency, verse 23.

But instead of minutely prosecuting those different inquiries, we will draw your attention to the two principal points which pervade the whole; namely,

1. The timely support which God affords to his distressed people.

The instances mentioned in the Psalm are only a few out of the numberless interpositions which God grants to men in distress; but whatever is the trouble from which we are delivered, it is of infinite importance that we see the hand of God both in the trouble itself and in the deliverance from it. There is neither good nor evil in a city, but it must be traced to God as its author. Whether men or devils are the agents, it matters not; they can do nothing without a special licence from God himself; and hence, when men had plundered Job of all his possessions, and Satan had destroyed all his children, he equally ascribed the different events to God, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away." Thus must we do; we must ascribe nothing to chance, and nothing to the creature, except as an instrument in the hands of God. If the folly or malignity of man injures us, or the wisdom or benevolence of man repairs the injury, we must look through the second causes, and fix our eyes on God, as the first great Cause of all! If we do not see God in the dispensations, of course we shall learn nothing of God from them; but if we behold his agency in them, then will our eyes be opened to see his wisdom and goodness also.

2. His condescending attention to their prayers.

In all the instances specified in this Psalm, God's interpositions are mentioned as answers to prayer, "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses." Many, alas! of the prayers which are offered in seasons of difficulty and distress have respect to nothing more than the particular occasion, and are accompanied with no real desire after God; yet even these prayers God often condescends to hear, just as he did the prayers in which Ahab deprecated the judgments denounced against him.

But when the prayers proceed from a penitent and contrite heart, and are offered up in the prevailing name of Jesus Christ, God will hear them at all times and under all circumstances. We do not say that the precise thing which may be asked shall certainly be granted; because God may see that, on the whole, that would not prove a blessing to the person who asks it; but no prayer that is offered up in faith shall go forth in vain; it shall surely be answered, if not in the way expected or desired, at least in a way that shall ultimately prove most conducive to the good of him who offers it.

These things being matters of daily occurrence, we shall proceed to mark,

II. The benefit arising from an attentive consideration of God's providential dealings.

From these we shall be led to notice, not merely the agency of God in all the concerns of man, but especially, and above all, his "loving-kindness" also. This will be seen,

1. In the darkest dispensations of his providence.

God's dearest children are not more exempt from trials than others; on the contrary, they are often most subjected to them. But in this, the loving-kindness of God is especially manifest; for by their trials he leads them to more fervent prayer; that prayer brings to them more signal interpositions; and those interpositions fill them with joy, far outweighing all the troubles they have endured.

Let any child of God look back to his former life, and say whether the events which once he regarded as the heaviest calamities, have not been overruled for his greatest good? Yes! It is not David only, but every child of God, that must say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." We may indeed, like Jacob, say for a time, "All these things are against me;" but when we have seen "the end" and outcome of the dispensation, we shall confess that "the Lord has been pitiful to us, and of tender mercy, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)."

If we view an insulated and individual occurrence, we may be perplexed respecting it; but if we view it in connection with all that has preceded and followed it, we shall be able to set our seal to the truth of that promise, "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)."

Whatever then the affliction may be under which we are suffering, let us never for a moment lose sight of that truth, "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens; and scourges every son whom he receives."

2. In the most painful operations of his grace.

The different circumstances adduced for the illustration of God's providence, may fitly be regarded as images to shadow forth also the operations of his grace. Truly in them we may see the needs and miseries, the helplessness and terrors, of an awakened soul.

Who that knows anything of his own state has not seen himself a wanderer from the ways of God, and perishing for lack of knowledge?

Who has not groaned, and bitterly too, under the chains of sin by which he has been tied and bound?

Who has not felt his inability to help himself, as much as if he had been dying of an incurable disorder?

And who has not seen himself sinking, as it were, into the bottomless abyss, and been almost "at his wit's end," because he saw not how his soul could be saved?

We do not mean to intimate that all converted people have felt these things in an equal degree; but all have felt them sufficiently to see the suitableness of these images to their own experience. What then shall we say? Does God, in allowing them to be so exercised, mark his displeasure against them? No! It is love, and love alone, that he manifests.

Multitudes of others he leaves to follow their own evil ways without fear, and without remorse; but those whom he loves he awakens from their security; he sends his Holy Spirit to convince them of sin; he stirs them up to fervent prayer; and then, in answer to their prayers, he speaks peace to their souls. "God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness! [Hebrews 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10-11) ."

Advice.

1. View the hand of God in everything.

Things may be called great or small by comparison; but, in fact, there is nothing small, when considered in relation to the possible events which may spring from it.

The opening of the book precisely in the place where the services of Mordecai to Ahasuerus were recorded, was as much a work of God as any other that is contained in the Sacred Volume! [Esther 6:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 6.1-3). And the circumstances connected with it were of incalculable importance to the whole Jewish nation.

Let nothing then be accounted small; but receive everything as from God, and endeavor to improve everything for him; and then shall everything enrich you with wisdom, and inflame your souls with gratitude and love.

2. Take occasion from everything to spread your needs before him in prayer.

The great, the universal remedy, to which we should have recourse, is Prayer. Prayer will turn everything to gold. Whether our trials be of a temporal or spiritual nature, they cannot fail of proving blessings if only they drive us to the throne of grace. The direction of God himself is, that "in everything we should make our requests known to him;" and, on our doing so, we are assured that "the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus! [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7)." "If we call upon him in the time of trouble, he will hear us," and turn all our complaints into praise and thanksgiving!

3. Give him the glory for all the deliverances you receive.

On all the different occasions mentioned in the Psalm, it is said, "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness!" This is the tribute which all of us are called to pay; and the very end which God proposes to himself, both in our trials and deliverances, is to make us sensible of his goodness, and to draw forth from us the tribute of a grateful heart. "Whoever offers him praise, glorifies him."

See to it then that your daily mercies call forth suitable returns of love and gratitude; and thus will you be preparing gradually for that blessed day, when all the mysterious designs of God, which now you could not penetrate, shall be unraveled, and all your sorrows terminate in endless joy!

#684

THE PERSON AND OFFICES OF CHRIST

**[Psalm 110:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1-7)**

"The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth. The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head!"

In some of the Psalms, David speaks of himself only; in others, of himself and of the Messiah too; but in this, Psalm of the Messiah exclusively; not a word is applicable to anyone else. The Jews have taken great pains to explain it away; but their attempts are, and ever must be, in vain.

In the first verse, David relates the Father's address to his Son, when "the council of peace was held between them;" and the whole of the remainder is addressed by the Psalmist to the Messiah himself. It altogether elucidates in a very striking manner the character of Christ. In it are set forth,

I. The **person** of Christ.

It is of great importance that we have just views of the DIVINITY of Christ.

On that depends the sufficiency of the atonement which he has offered for the sins of men. If he is only a creature, how can we be assured that the shedding of his blood has any more virtue and efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats? What proportion is there between the transitory sufferings of one creature, and the accumulated sins of all believers? How can we conceive that there should be such a value in the blood of any created being, as to purchase for a ruined world a deliverance from everlasting misery, and a possession of everlasting happiness and glory?

But if our Redeemer is God as well as man, then we see at once, that, inasmuch as he is an infinitely glorious Being, there is an infinite merit in his obedience unto death, sufficient to justify the demands of law and justice for the sins of his people.

On any other supposition than that Christ is God, there would be no force at all in that question of the Apostle, "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)." What argument would it be to say, "He who gave us a creature, how shall he not also give us himself, and all the glory of Heaven?" But if Christ is God, equal with the Father, then the argument is clear, obvious, and unanswerable.

In the Psalm before us the divinity of Christ is plainly asserted.

Our blessed Lord himself appeals to it, in order to confound and silence his malignant adversaries. Both Pharisees and Sadducees had endeavored to ensnare him by difficult and perplexing questions; and, when he had answered, he put this question to them, "What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he?" And when they said, "The Son of David," he asked them, "How then does David in Spirit call him Lord, saying: The Lord said unto my Lord, etc. If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?" And then we are told, "No man was able to answer him a word! [Matthew 22:41-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.41-46)."

Had they been willing to acknowledge Christ as their Messiah, they needed not to have been at any loss for an answer; for they knew him to be a son of David; and he had repeatedly declared himself to be God, insomuch that they had again and again taken up stones to stone him for blasphemy. But this passage proved beyond all doubt that the Messiah was to be "the root, as well as the offspring of David;" the Lord of David, as well as David's son.

And here it is worthy of notice, that we see in this appeal what the interpretation was which the Jews of that day put upon the Psalm before us. They all understood it as relating to the Messiah; and all the attempts of modern Jews to put any other construction upon it are futile in the extreme.

But by comparing the parallel passage in Mark, we see what the Jews of that day thought of the doctrine of the Trinity, [Mark 12:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.35-37). Our Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as inspiring David, (which none but Jehovah could do,) to declare what Jehovah the Father had said to Jehovah the Son. If the doctrine of the Trinity had not been received among them, would they have been silent, and not known what to answer him? And would they from this time have been deterred by it from asking him any more questions?

Be it known then, that Christ is very God, and very man; he is that "Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1); [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14);" "God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)." He is, as the prophet calls him, "the Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6)," or, as Paul calls him, "the Great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, [Titus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.13)," "God over all blessed forever [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)."

The Psalmist now addressing himself to the Messiah, proclaims to him the success that would attend him in the execution of,

II. The **offices** of Christ.

The second and third verses may undoubtedly be applied to his regal office, because they speak of his "ruling in the midst of his enemies;" but, if we consider how his victories are gained, namely, by his Word and Spirit, and that it is by the illumination of men's minds that he subdues their hearts, we shall see that this part of the Psalm may properly be understood as relating to his prophetic character. Accordingly we behold him here represented as,

1. A **Prophet**.

The word is "the rod of his strength," by which he works all the wonders of his grace. In itself it is as weak and inefficient as the rod of Moses, whereby he wrought all his miracles in Egypt; but, as applied by the Spirit of God to the souls of men, it is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," and "is mighty to the pulling down of all the strongholds" of sin and Satan, "it is the power of God unto salvation to all those who believe, [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)." It "came forth from Zion, even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, [Isaiah 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.3)," when it was published by the holy Apostles; who delivered it, as they were commanded, to Jerusalem first, and then to other parts of the world. And there is this remarkable difference between the victories gained by it, and those gained by any carnal weapon; by the latter, men are brought to a reluctant submission; by the former, they are "made willing," truly and cordially willing, to take Christ's yoke upon them!

Whenever the Lord's time, the "day of his power," is come, they, like the rams of Nebaioth, present themselves as voluntary sacrifices at God's altar, and give up themselves unreservedly to the Lord! Compare that beautiful passage, [Isaiah 60:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.4-8) with [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1) and [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5).

Nor is deliverance from death and Hell the only object of their pursuit. They feel that they can be happy only in the way of holiness; and therefore "in the beauties of holiness" they come unto him.

Their dispositions and habits are all changed.

They abstain from sin, because they hate it.

They obey the God's commands, because they love them.

And, could they obtain the desire of their hearts, they would be as "holy as God is holy," and "perfect, even as their Father in Heaven is perfect!"

The numbers that shall thus be converted to the Lord exceed all calculation or conception. As the drops of "dew" issuing from "the womb of the morning," so will be the progeny that shall be born to him, innumerable. There may be but "an handful of corn cast on the top of the mountains; but yet shall the fruit be as the woods of Lebanon, and as the piles of grass upon the earth, [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.16)."

Thus powerfully did his Word and Spirit operate in the early age of the Church; and thus shall they operate to the very end of time; and it is worthy of particular observation, that the very first verse of this Psalm, with the explanation given of it by the Apostle, was that which pierced the hearts of our Lord's murderers, and subdued three thousand of them at once to the obedience of faith! [Acts 2:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.34-37).

David now proceeds to speak of Christ as,

2. A **Priest**.

As Christ was to offer a sacrifice for the sins of his people, he must of necessity be a priest. But from the Levitical priesthood, which was confined to the tribe of Levi, he was of necessity excluded, because he was of the tribe of Judah. There was however a priesthood of another order, the order of Melchizedek; and to that he was solemnly consecrated with an oath. What that priesthood was, we would never have known, if it had not been explained to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the Mosaic history, Melchizedek is briefly mentioned, without any account of his predecessors or successors in his office, [Genesis 14:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.18-20); and this was particularly overruled by God, in order that he might be a type of Christ, whose priesthood was from everlasting (in the divine counsels,) and everlastingly to continue in himself alone.

Now at the time that the Levitical priesthood was in all its glory, David foretold that it would be superseded, (and the whole Mosaic economy with it,) by a priesthood of a higher order; a priesthood, which Abraham himself, and all his posterity in him, acknowledged, and which, on account of the solemnity of its appointment, and the perpetuity of its duration, was of a far higher order, [Hebrews 7:1-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.1-28).

Is it inquired, What sacrifice he had to offer? We answer, His own body, which "through the eternal Spirit he offered without spot to God." And, having offered that sacrifice once for all, he now intercedes for us within the veil; and will come again at the end of the world to bless his redeemed people, and to make them partakers of everlasting blessedness.

But it is foretold yet further, that he was also to be,

3. A **King**.

Some, to reconcile verse 5 with verse 1, suppose that in verse 5, David ceases to address the Messiah, and directs his speech to the Father. But this introduces needless perplexity into the subject. If we understand "The Lord at your right hand," as meaning, The Lord who is your strength and your support, (which is certainly its most obvious meaning,) the whole speech is uninterrupted and clear.

Melchizedek, though a priest, was a king also, and one that was most eminently fitted to typify the Savior, being "king of righteousness and peace, [Hebrews 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.2)." Thus was Christ not a priest only, but "a priest upon his throne, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13)." Being now exalted to the right hand of God, he "sits there, until all his enemies become his footstool." "To him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear" allegiance. Or, if any continue to withstand his overtures of mercy, he will smite them to the ground; yes, though they be the greatest monarchs upon earth, "He will strike through kings in the day of his wrath."

There is "a day of wrath," as well as a day of mercy; and terrible indeed will be "the wrath of the Lamb!" As a mighty conqueror desolates the countries which he overruns, and fills them with the bodies of the slain—so will Jesus do in that solemn day. If he does not rule men by their free consent, as their Lord, he will judge them as rebels, and "wound the heads of all" to the remotest corners of the earth; he will say, "Bring here those that were my enemies, who would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me."

Previous to his own victories, he was himself, according to human estimate, to be overcome. But his humiliation was to pave the way for his exaltation, "by death he was to overcome him who had the power of death, and to deliver from death" his ransomed people!

This was the way pointed out in the very first proclamation of mercy to fallen man, "The Seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head; but the serpent was first to bruise his heel, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)." Accordingly he did "drink of the brook along the way;" he suffered infinitely more than words can express, or the mind of man can conceive; and then "he lifted up his head," and was "exalted far above all principalities and powers," whether of Heaven or Hell; and he "shall surely reign until all his enemies be put under his feet!"

We cannot **improve** this subject better than by asking,

1. What do you think of Christ?

This is the very question which our Lord himself asked in reference to this Psalm. Yet it is not a mere theoretical opinion that we ask for, but the practical persuasion of your hearts.

Do you view him with reverence and love as your incarnate God?

Do you look to him as your Prophet, to teach and guide you into all truth?

Do you look to him as your great High Priest, trusting in his sin-atoning sacrifice, and imploring a saving interest in his prevailing intercession?

Do you farther look to him as your King, desiring him to bring, not your actions only, but "your every thought, into captivity" to his sacred will?

This is the test whereby you are to try the state of your souls before God; for according to your experience of these things, will be your sentence in the day of judgment!

2. What measure have you of **resemblance**to him?

God has ordained that all his people should "be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)," in sufferings, in holiness, and in glory. "The Captain of our Salvation was made perfect through sufferings;" and "all the sons who shall be brought to glory" must be made perfect in the same way, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10). "Through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of Heaven." The "mortifying of our members upon earth," with "the cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye," are strong and significant expressions, showing clearly, that a life of godliness requires much painful labor and self-denial.

Besides, there is much persecution also to be endured from an ungodly world; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution!"

Nor are the conflicts that are to be sustained with all the powers of darkness of small consideration in the Christian's warfare. Let me ask then:

Are you following Christ in this way?

Are you "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts?"

Are you "following him boldly outside the camp, bearing his reproach?"

Are you "fighting manfully the good fight of faith," and "wrestling, not only with flesh and blood, but with all the principalities and powers of Hell?"

Be assured that "the kingdom of Heaven cannot be taken without violence; the violent must take it by force." The work and offices of Christ will be of no avail in our behalf, if we do not "take up our cross daily and follow him."

Awake then, all of you, to the duties that are assigned you; and be content to suffer with him, that you may be also glorified together with him.

#685

THE GREAT WORK OF REDEMPTION

**[Psalm 111:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.2)**

"Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them!"

This Psalm is one of those appointed by our Church for Easter Day; for which it is sufficiently appropriate, in that it celebrates that redemption of God's people from Egypt, which was typical of the redemption wrought out for us by Christ upon the cross, and perfected by his resurrection from the dead.

The structure of it is very peculiar. Every sentence begins with the different letters of the Hebrew alphabet in their order; the eight first verses consisting each of two sentences, and the two last of three sentences. This artificial mode of writing it seems to have been with a view to its being more easily remembered.

The first word of it, "Hallelujah," was, in fact, no part of the Psalm itself, but only the title of it; and it shows us with what disposition of mind the subject should be contemplated, and with what feelings it was recorded. O that our souls might rise to the occasion, while we consider,

I. The greatness of God's works!

Great indeed they were—even the deliverances accomplished for Israel in Egypt. Who can read:  
of all the plagues with which that land was visited;  
or of the destruction of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea;  
or of the wonders wrought for Israel in the wilderness;  
or of their final establishment in the land of Canaan  
—and not exclaim, "Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty!"

But, however much we may be disposed, in imitation of David in this Psalm, to admire the attributes of God as illustrated in that stupendous work—we are called to the consideration of infinitely greater works, of which the deliverance from Egypt was but a type and shadow. Yes, in the redemption of sinners, we behold the perfections of our God shining forth, as it were, in meridian splendor.

1. Christ's work of redeeming sinners, is beyond all conception great in **wisdom** and **power**.

When Moses saw what God had wrought for the people of Israel at the Red Sea, he sang, "Who is like unto you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders! [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11)."

But Paul speaks of our blessed Lord as concentrating in himself all that is great and glorious, and as being, as it were in the abstract, "The wisdom of God, and the power of God! [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24)." O what unsearchable depths of *wisdom* were contained in that mystery of the substitution of God's only dear Son in the place of sinners; whereby the sins of men are expiated, and the kingdom of Heaven opened to millions, who, without such a Savior, must have inherited the blackness of darkness forever!

Nor was the power that effected our redemption less manifest, in forming the human nature of our Lord in the womb of a pure Virgin, free from all the taint of our original corruption; and enabling that body, so wonderfully formed, to bear the curse due to our iniquities, and to work out a righteousness adequate to the needs, and sufficient for the necessities, of a ruined world.

View the triumphs of Jesus in the wilderness, and in the garden, and on the cross; in all of which "he spoiled the principalities and powers of Hell." View them also in his resurrection, and ascension, and in the operations of the Holy Spirit, whom he sent from Heaven to complete the wonders of his grace; view these things, and say, whether "his work is not indeed honorable and glorious verse 3," the very summit of wisdom, and the perfection of power.

2.Christ's work of redeeming sinners, is beyond all conception great in **goodness** and **mercy**.

So conspicuous were these perfections in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, that David could behold, as it were, nothing else. In a Psalm where he specifies a great variety of particulars relating to it, he repeats no less than twenty-six times in as many verses, "His mercy endures forever! Psalm 136."

But what shall we say of his goodness and mercy to us in Christ Jesus? Eternity will be too short to enumerate the instances wherein these perfections are displayed, and to make such acknowledgments as this exhibition of them calls for at our hands.

The manna from Heaven, and the water from the rock—were but faint images of what we receive in and from the Lord Jesus Christ. O what supplies of grace, what rich communications of his blessed Spirit, does he impart to us from day to day! And what forbearance does he exercise towards us! Well indeed may we say with David, that "goodness and mercy have followed us all our days."

3.Christ's work of redeeming sinners, is beyond all conception great in **righteousness** and **truth**.

In the whole work of redemtion, whether towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, as our representative, or towards us whom he has redeemed, there has not been one single act which was not an act of justice, and an accomplishment of some preexisting declaration. Were our iniquities laid on the Lord Jesus, and punished in him? Was he, after having expiated those sins, exalted to glory, and seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high? All, as David speaks, "was truth and judgment, verse 7." In like manner, if we are pardoned, and raised to a participation of his glory, "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other, [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)." Every threatening denounced against sin has been executed in the person of Christ; and everything promised to Christ, or to us, is fulfilled, when for Christ's sake we are restored to God's favor, and made heirs of his inheritance.

Agreeable to this character of God's works is,

II. The respect paid to God's works by every true Christian.

The Christian is fitly represented as one "who has pleasure in the wonders of redeeming love."

Alas! The generality of mankind have no pleasure in God's works, but rather put away the remembrance of them with abhorrence!

But not so the Christian; he regards them with far different sensations. He indeed is not insensible to pleasures of other kinds, provided they be such as may be enjoyed with a good conscience towards God. He may, as a scholar and philosopher, feel delight in intellectual pursuits; and he may, as a member of society, find pleasure in the fellowship of friendship, or the enjoyment of domestic comforts. But, though he never loses his taste for such pleasures, his delight in them is altogether subordinated to higher and more spiritual enjoyments. Whatever he once accounted gain, is now esteemed by him comparatively as dross and dung! [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8); The wonders of redeeming love are on earth, as they will be in Heaven—his constant solace, and his song.

By him the wonders of redeeming love "are sought out" with care and diligence.

With a view to a more enlarged knowledge of redeeming love, the Christian reads the Holy Scriptures, searching into them as for hidden treasures. He attends carefully on the ministry of the Word, that he may both obtain a further insight into the Gospel, and have a richer experience of it in his soul. By constant meditation also, and by fervent prayer, he dives deeper and deeper into the great mysteries of redeeming love; musing, as it were, day and night, and crying mightily to God, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!"

Never does he imagine that he has attained. The more enlarged his views become, the more he sees that he knows nothing yet as he ought to know; and he looks forward with proportionable earnestness to the eternal world, where the veil shall be taken from before his eyes, and he "will see as he is seen," and "know even as he is known."

ADDRESS.

1. Seek yet more and more this most desirable of all knowledge.

See with what persevering diligence the scientist prosecutes the attainment of science. And will not you, for the acquiring of knowledge wherein eternal life consists, and "which the angels themselves desire to look into?"

2. Endeavor more and more to make a suitable improvement of your knowledge.

"Hallelujah" stands as the introduction to the contemplations of David. Let all your contemplations lead to, and terminate in, a similar acclamation. Such will be the result of all the knowledge which we shall possess in Heaven; and such should be our improvement of all that we attain on earth!

#686

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

**[Psalm 111:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.10)**

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise!"

Of all attainments that are made by man, wisdom is confessedly the highest; and well does it deserve the highest place in our esteem, because it elevates and ennobles him in whom it is found. This is true even of human wisdom; how much more, then, of that which is divine!

But where shall divine wisdom be found? Who can ever estimate it aright, when found? These are questions propounded by holy Job; and they deserve our most attentive consideration. "But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; the sea says, 'It is not with me.' It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver. It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, with precious onyx or sapphires. Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold. Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention; the price of wisdom is beyond rubies. The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it; it cannot be bought with pure gold! [Job 28:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.12-19)."

Having stated all this, he again asks the question, "Whence then comes wisdom? And where is the place of understanding?" He then answers, that it is hidden from the eyes of all living; that God alone understands it; and that he has declared where and what it is, "Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding! [Job 28:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.20-21); [Job 28:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.24); [Job 28:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.27-28)."

Now, as rich and determinate as this passage is, it does not equal the declaration of David, who says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise!" Here he not only identifies the fear of the Lord with wisdom, but carries on the comparison from the beginning to the end, from the first formation of them in the soul, to their final completion in glory.

To enter fully into his meaning, we shall consider

I. The fear of the Lord **as existing in the soul**.

"Man is born like a wild donkey's colt," and is as destitute of true wisdom as the animal. "The fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom;" and then only does wisdom exist in the soul, when the fear of the Lord is implanted in it. But,

What do we understand by the fear of the Lord?

This needs not to be stated at any length, because a very few words will suffice to explain it. The fear of the Lord is here put for true religion; even for such religion as manifests itself by:  
a deep humiliation for sin before God,  
a simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and an unreserved obedience to his will.

The fear of the Lord does not consist in a mere assent to the truths of the gospel, or a mere profession of it as the only way to glory. True fear of God is a real surrender of ourselves to Him as His redeemed people.

The fear of God, when genuinely existing in the soul, is true wisdom.

There is no true wisdom where this fear is not; for without this fear, a man views nothing aright, and does nothing aright. Earthly things have in his eyes an importance which does not properly belong to them; and heavenly things are in no respect appreciated according to their real worth.

But when "God has put his fear into our hearts," our misconceptions are removed, and our mistakes rectified. Sin is no longer that light and trivial evil which we before supposed it to be. Nor is salvation judged to be of so small consequence, that we can any longer neglect it. The salvation of the soul becomes from that moment, the one thing needful; and all the concerns of time are swallowed up in those of eternity. This may be accounted folly; yes, it is so accounted by an ignorant and ungodly world; but God declares it to be wisdom; and such it will prove itself to be in the outcome.

II. Trace the fear of the Lord as **operating in the life**.

In all its bearings, and in all its operations, the fear of the Lord approves itself to be true wisdom.

1. Genuine fear of God operates in the different ages and relations of life.

Of whatever age a person be, whether young or old, the fear of the Lord will dictate to him such a deportment as befits him. And in every relation of life it will exalt his character. Husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, magistrate or subject—all will know their place; all will fulfill their duties; all will execute their respective offices with care. In nothing will the operation of this principle more clearly appear, than in stimulating every Christian to discharge with diligence and propriety the duties of his own peculiar calling.

2. Genuine fear of God operates in the different circumstances in which it may be placed.

Are we in prosperity?

Genuine fear of God will keep us humble, and watchful against the temptations to which prosperity will expose us.

Are we in adversity of any kind?

Genuine fear of God will support us from fainting and murmuring, on the one hand; and from a contemptuous apathy on the other. It will cause us to acknowledge a divine agency in everything that occurs; and to make such an improvement of it, as that God may be glorified in all.

Of course, I must not saying that the fear of God will enlarge a man's intellectual powers, any more than it will increase his bodily stature; at least, not to such a degree as to divest a man of his natural weakness. A man who is of slender mental capacity will continue so; and he will be liable to misapprehensions as arising out of that circumstance. A person of a weak mind will betray that weakness in anything that may engage his attention; and, if it shows itself in his religious deportment, it will be very unjust to ascribe that to religion which proceeds only from his own imbecility, and would equally show itself in any other occupation or pursuit.

But this I will say, that genuine fear of God will go far to direct him, where his judgment, not so regulated, would err; and that, consequently, he will on the whole excel in wisdom those whose capacity and attainments are in other respects on a level with his own.

I will further say, that, in proportion as he advances in true piety, his profiting in wisdom also will appear unto all.

Let us view this principle yet further,

III. Let us view the fear of God as **completed in the eternal world**.

The applause which ungodly men gain from their blind companions is of very short continuance. But that which piety secures will endure forever.

The man who fears the Lord is not without applause in this world.

What if he is derided by some? It is only by those who know not what true wisdom is; and who, if they acted in reference to earthly things as they do in relation to their heavenly concerns, would themselves be regarded by all mankind as fools and idiots. By every man whose good opinion is worth having, the godly man is loved and honored; yes, and God himself also honors him with the richest manifestations of his presence and love.

And how is he honored in the eternal world! There the angels of God bear him on their wings, exulting in the office assigned to them of ministering unto him. And no sooner is he arrived at the portals of Heaven, than he is welcomed by God himself, who, in the presence of all the heavenly host, addresses him, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!" Behold the crown prepared for him! Behold the throne also made ready for his reception! Behold the kingdom awarded to him as his inheritance, of which he takes possession as an "heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ!" Yes, truly, this is his praise; and will be so when they who here despised him shall "awake to shame and everlasting contempt."

"This praise, too, endures forever." While his once contemptuous enemies are "weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth" in Hell, he will be in the full enjoyment of glory and honor and immortality, in the bosom of his God.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who despise true religion.

Why is it that you despise it? Your contempt of it is altogether founded on your own ignorance and wickedness. "Satan has blinded your eyes," and hardened your hearts, and is "leading you captive at his will." And how long, Do you think, will you retain your present opinions?

If God Almighty ever has mercy on your soul, your eyes will be opened to see your folly and impiety; but, if this mercy never be given to you, not a minute will intervene between your departure hence and a total change of your views. You will then be perfectly like-minded with those whom you now despise; but who can express the regret which you will then feel at the review of your conduct? But then your regrets will be in vain; your day of grace will have forever passed away; and you will forever reap the bitter fruits of your wickedness.

2. Those who are afraid of confessing Christ by reason of the contempt which they shall thereby encounter.

It was not thus that your Savior dealt with you. He knew to what shame and ignominy he would be exposed for you; and yet, "for the joy of saving your souls, he endured the cross and despised the shame, and has now sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The same blessed outcome is reserved for you also, if you approve yourselves faithful unto him, "If you deny him, he will deny you;" but, if you submit willingly to "suffer with him, you shall also be glorified together! [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17) and [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12)." Regard not, then, the scoffs of the ungodly world; but "rejoice rather that you are counted worthy to endure them."

But, after all, what is it that you are afraid of? An unkind look? An opprobrious name? The finger of scorn? Truly you have but little pretense to wisdom, if by such things as these you can be deterred from confessing Him who lived and died for you.

3. Those who by reason of indiscretion "give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully".

It is greatly to be lamented that all who profess godliness do not act so wisely as they ought. There are many who, by the extravagance of their notions, or the absurdity of their deportment, cause religion itself to be reproached, and "the way of truth to be evil spoken of." But I must declare to all such professors, that they incur a fearful responsibility before God; and that for every one who falls over the stumbling-blocks which are thus laid in his way, they must give account in the day of judgment.

See to it then, brethren, that you "walk in wisdom towards those that are outside;" and that instead of giving occasion of offence by any unwise conduct on your part, you "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by your well-doing."

Never forget that wisdom is identified with religion. It admits of nothing that is foolish or extravagant in any respect. Prudence, sobriety, soundness of judgment, and true discretion, are inseparable from it; and if we would adorn our profession, or be accepted by our God, we must "walk wisely before him in a perfect way! [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)."

#687

GREATNESS AND CONDESCENSION OF GOD

**[Psalm 113:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 113.5-8)**

"Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people."

Truly, God is to be praised, "from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, his name" should be glorious, "He is above all blessing and praise." Whether we consider what he is in himself, or what he is to us, we cannot but exclaim, "Who is like unto the Lord?" If men be not filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of him, it is because they know him not, neither contemplate him; but we can scarcely fail of being in some measure suitably impressed with his excellency, if we consider those perfections of his which are set before us in our text:

I. God's greatness.

"Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?"

But how shall we convey any idea of this! If we speak of created things, however great, we can give some kind of statement, which, though very inadequate, will convey a slight notion at least of the subject. However great the disparity between a monarch and a worm, or between the globe and a grain of sand, there is something whereon we may ground a comparison between them, and something to which we may affix tolerably definite ideas. But between the Creator and the creature there is no point of comparison.

If we attempt to declare his immensity, and say, that in all the boundless regions of space God is everywhere, and as entirely present in every different spot as if he were no where in the universe besides, what are we the nearer to any just apprehension of him? Our intellect is not capable of conceiving of him aright. Were a peasant told respecting the motions and distances and mutual dependence of the heavenly bodies, how much of it would he understand? It would be far above his comprehension; he could not embrace any part of the system. Just so, if we presume to speak of the greatness and incomprehensibility of Jehovah, we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge;" "it is a knowledge too wonderful for us; we cannot attain unto it."

The opinions of Zophar on this subject are well worthy of our attention,

"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)." And Elihu, another of Job's friends, exactly to the same purpose says, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out! [Job 37:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 37.23)."

Sometimes indeed God is pleased to give us some little glimpse of his majesty; light enough, if we may so speak, to make our darkness visible. Thus by the Prophet Isaiah he asks, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out Heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; he takes up the islands as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity." He then adds, "To whom then will you liken God? or what likeness will you compare unto him? [Isaiah 40:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.12); [Isaiah 40:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.15); [Isaiah 40:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.17-18)."

The Psalmist also, with exquisite beauty, thus sets forth the glory of his majesty, "Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved! [Psalm 104:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 104.1-5)."

But, after all, what idea does this description give us of Him, who "fills all things," "whom the Heaven of heavens cannot contain?" We are altogether at a loss on so mysterious a subject; which therefore we close with that declaration of the Psalmist, "His greatness is unsearchable! [Psalm 145:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.3)."

But though we can add nothing to what is said in the words before our text, "The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory is above the heavens," yet we see in this what will serve to illustrate the depth of,

II. God's condescension.

"He humbles himself to behold the things that are in Heaven;" yes, if he deigns to cast an eye upon the highest angels and archangels, it is an act of infinite condescension; for, as intelligent as they are in comparison with us, "he charges them with folly!" And as pure as Heaven itself is in comparison with earth, it is "not clean in his sight! [Job 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.18); [Job 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.15)." But he will stoop even to look down on earth, yes and on the lowest and vilest of its inhabitants, provided they do but humble themselves before him.

The believing poor and needy, even in their lowest state, ever have been, and ever shall be, objects of his peculiar regard. Men may be low in station, in character, and in spirit; but he will notice them notwithstanding.

The description given us of Lazarus, represents a condition more deplorable than usually falls to the lot of man; yet was he set forth as an object of the tenderest compassion to Almighty God.

The dying thief may well be adduced as among the most degraded of the human race; yet did the Savior honor him with an express and audible assurance, that he should that very day be with him in Paradise.

"To the man that is poor and of a contrite spirit" God has promised in a more especial manner to "look, in order to revive and comfort his drooping spirit." Only let a person lie in the dust before God, and sit, like Job, upon the dunghill, from a consciousness of his own extreme unworthiness; and God will fly instantly to his relief, "he will raise the poor out of the dust, and lift up the needy out of the dunghill!"

Nor is there any dignity, however high, to which he will not exalt him, "he will set him among the princes, even with the princes of his people!" Yes, he will cause him to "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven," and to reign with them in glory forever and ever!

Perhaps the primary import of our text may be found in the elevation of such men as Saul and David from the lowest offices to the throne of Israel. But in the Psalm, as well as in the Song of Hannah, from whence it is taken, [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8), we must undoubtedly look for a higher meaning, even the elevation of an immortal soul from the lowest state of sin and misery to all the glory and felicity of Heaven. Would we have a just conception of the change which by the tender mercy of our God shall be wrought on the poor and contrite, we may behold our blessed Lord raised from the grave, to which with unparalleled ignominy he had been committed, and exalted to the right hand of God, above all the principalities and powers both of earth and Heaven. Thus will the poor and contrite soul be raised from guilt to peace, from sin to holiness, from the very gates of Hell even to the throne of God.

Does our God so condescend to you?

1. Then let me call on you to **adore** him.

Frequently does this expression occur in the Holy Scriptures, "O Lord, who is like unto you?" And continually should the thought be in our minds. It is impossible to know anything of the condescension and grace of God, and not be lost in wonder and in praise. We do not say that livelier emotions of joy are wrong; but they are always to be suspected, if they be not blended with a considerable measure of self-loathing and self-abhorrence. Profound adoration and devotion seems to be the proper posture of a redeemed soul. O you poor, whose station is so low that the greater part of your fellow-creatures would scarcely deign to notice you, think what love God has shown towards you, if he has made you rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom! [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5). And you whose character has been so degraded as to have almost resembled that of the Corinthians, think what reason you have to adore your God, if it can be said of you, as of them, "But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God! [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-11)."

Above all, you drooping and desponding souls, who once were ready to say, "There is no hope!" What thanks can you give for those rich assurances and consolations which now form a very foretaste of Heaven in your souls? And in all these changes, consider chiefly the means which have been used to effect them.

It is not by a mere act of mercy that God has wrought these things for you, but by taking on himself your miseries, that you may be partakers of his glory. To view the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ aright, you must bear in mind, that "though he was rich—yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)." Yes, "He was made sin for you, that you might be made the righteousness of God in him [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21)." O extol him, praise him, magnify him, and adore him and let all that is within you bless his holy name!

2. Then let me call on you to **trust** in him.

The greatest discouragements of the saints arise from a view of their own unworthiness. But God, if I may so speak, loves to see you in the dust and on the dunghill. The lower you are abased before him, the more he delights to exalt you. He even derives to himself a glory from the very depths to which he condescends for you. Add not then to all your other sins, that most hateful one of limiting his mercy. If your "sins have ever so much abounded, his grace will much more abound," if only you seek it in Christ Jesus, your Mediator and Redeemer. If you attempt to measure God's love and mercy by any created standard, then you must of necessity dishonor him exceedingly; for there is nothing finite that will admit of a comparison with him who is infinite.

As for his mercy, he most of all is grieved to have that disparaged, because it is the attribute in which he chiefly delights. Whatever then are your sins, or sorrows, or needs, or fears, cast them all on him, and know that you shall never be disappointed; for "as his majesty is, so also is his mercy."

3. Then let me call on you to **glorify** him.

We have no fear, but that if once you are led to trust in him aright, your most anxious inquiry will be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me?" Methinks you will of yourselves be panting after opportunities to testify to him your love and gratitude, "No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you! [Jeremiah 10:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.6-7)."

You will see, that to surrender up yourselves wholly to him is your "reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." Knowing that "you are not your own, but are bought with a price, you will long to glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are his! [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)."

We call you then to this blessed duty, to "live no more unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you and rose again." He has made you most blessed among men; for "who is like unto you, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord, [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)." O let it be seen then, that he has made you also the most holy of all the people upon earth. He has set you among the princes now, that you may have fellowship with all the holy Prophets and Apostles of old; and by walking in their steps, you will soon arrive at those blissful mansions, where you shall share with them in their inheritance, and be yourselves "kings and priests unto God and our Father forever and ever!"

#688

TRUST IN GOD RECOMMENDED

**[Psalm 115:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 115.9-13)**

"O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. You who fear him, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield. The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, he will bless those who fear the LORD—small and great alike!"

As great as the stupidity of fallen man is, one would not have imagined that it should ever enter into his mind to worship the works of his own hands. To come before those idols who cannot see; and address ourselves to those that cannot answer; and offer sacrifices to those who can smell no sweet savor from them; and to rely on those who have no operative or locomotive powers—all this seems to be a degree of imbecility beyond what one would conceive a creature possessed of reason should labor under. But so it is.

There are millions of such people, who are, in fact, as senseless as the objects they worship. But there is one who is able either to save or to destroy, even Jehovah, "who dwells in the heavens, and does whatever pleases him verse 3-8." And to him I will now call your most devout attention, in the words of my text, "O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield!"

I. In these words we behold **our duty**.

This is specified again and again, "Trust in the Lord." Now this is,

1. Trust in the Lord is a **comprehensive duty**.

Our necessities are numberless; our trust in Him, therefore, for the supply of them must extend to our every need-temporal, spiritual, eternal.

We must trust in his Word; which, as it is in reality the only proper ground of confidence, must also be the measure of it. We have no authority to trust in God for anything which he has not promised; and we are bound to trust in him for everything that he has promised. To do the former is presumption; to decline the latter is unbelief.

We must trust, also, in his Providence; for everything is ordered by him, even to "the falling of a sparrow upon the ground, "and we are incapable of ordering anything for ourselves, "it is not in man that walks to direct his steps [Jeremiah 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.23)."

We must trust also in his grace; for "we cannot do any good thing without him, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)." It is from him that we must obtain "power either to do, or even to will," what is acceptable in his sight, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13); and in every stage of our existence must we depend on him for "more grace, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6)," and receive from him "the grace that shall be sufficient for us, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)."

Thus must we look up to him as the source of all good, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17), whether for the body or the soul, for time or for eternity.

2. Trust in the Lord is a **universal duty**.

Every person, in every condition, is equally dependent on God, and must equally look to him for a supply of his necessities.

"O Israel, trust in the Lord!" Though you have been admitted into covenant with God, and are numbered by him among his peculiar people, you have not on that account any more sufficiency in yourself than others. You are still, and will be to your dying hour, as helpless as a little child, and must be borne by him as an infant in its mother's arms.

"O House of Aaron, trust in the Lord!" You, who are exercising the office of the priesthood, have peculiar need of help from above, in order to discharge it to the satisfaction of your God. Your difficulties are great; your duties arduous; and you have no more strength in yourself than other men. Even the Apostle Paul exclaimed, "Who is sufficient for these things? [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)." You have to give an account of the souls of others, as well as of your own; and methinks, a double portion of help from above is necessary for you, in order that you may prevail at last to "save yourself and those who hear you."

"You also that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!" As there were proselytes among the Jews who were not considered on the high footing of native Israelites, so are there many at this time who are not publicly known and recognized as God's peculiar people, who yet do truly "fear him;" and shall these be overlooked? No! You are privileged to trust in the Lord, as much as others; and may expect from him all needful blessings, as much as others; for "God is no respecter of persons; but, in every nation, he who fears God, and works righteousness shall be accepted by him, [Acts 10:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.34-35)."

Such being the duty enjoined on all, let us consider,

II. In these words we behold **our encouragement to perform our duty**.

This is twofold, arising,

1. From what God has **already done for us**.

"He has been mindful of us," of all of us, without exception. To whom of those who ever trusted in him, has he not been both "a help and a shield?" Whom has he not protected from innumerable dangers, and assisted in times of difficulty? Can anyone doubt but that he would have long since perished from the assaults of sin and Satan, if God had not been with him to preserve and uphold him?

But it is not in time only that God has been mindful of us; from all eternity has his eye been fixed upon us, and his infinite wisdom been occupied in our behalf. Long before we were in existence, or the foundations of the earth were laid, he made provision for our eternal happiness. He foresaw that we should fall; and he entered into covenant with his own Son to redeem us. He engaged also his Holy Spirit, to execute within us all the purposes of his love.

Say, Is not this a sufficient ground for trusting in him? What greater encouragement can we have?

2. From what he is engaged **to do for us**.

"He will bless us." We need not fear it; for it is a work in which he greatly delights.

"He will bless the House of Israel." They are "his peculiar people," "his household," "his sons and daughters, [2 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.18);" Will he forget them? "They are engraved upon the palms of his hands;" and sooner may "a mother forget her nursing child, than he forget" to minister to them whatever they may stand in need of, [Isaiah 49:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.15-16). His word is pledged to them; and "sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of his Word shall fail, [Isaiah 54:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.9-10)."

"He will bless the House of Aaron" too, and give to them such communications of grace and peace as the world have no conception of, "clothing them with salvation, and making them to shout aloud for joy! [Psalm 132:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.16)."

The priest, when offering incense, may give us some idea of what the Lord imparts to his faithful servants while occupied in his service. No other person was privileged to offer incense, nor he himself on any other occasion than that; but then, while honoring God with it, he was richly regaled with its fragrances.

Such is the privilege of all God's faithful servants, in the midst of their laborious duties. Their face often shines with radiance from God upon the holy mount; though, by reason of the veil they wear, it is not discerned in their fellowship with the world.

"He will indeed bless all who fear the Lord, both small and great." They may be overlooked by men; but they are known to God; and his eye is over them for good. It matters not whether they be great or small. The great are not so great, but that they need his blessing; nor are the small so insignificant, that they shall be deemed unworthy of his notice. If they are as beggars on a dunghill, even there will he visit them; and from thence will he take them, "to set them among the princes, and to make them inherit a throne of glory, [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8)."

To all of them, without exception, will he give occasion for that devout acknowledgment, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ!"

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are ignorant of God.

This is the state of all who are not living in the habitual performance of the duty here enjoined; for, "if they knew God's name, they would put their trust in him, [Psalm 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.10)."

Let me then ask of you, Who will be your help, and your shield? Who in this world? Who, when you shall be standing at the judgment-seat of Christ, and the sword of vengeance is lifted up for your destruction? O seek to know God, especially as he is revealed to us in Christ Jesus! And tremble now for fear of his judgments; and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before you. So shall you even yet escape his wrath, and receive at his hands all the blessings of salvation!

2. Those who are putting their trust in him.

Whom among you all has he ever disappointed of his hope? Are you not all witnesses for him, that he is faithful to his Word, and that "of all the good things that he has promised you, not so much as one has ever failed! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)." He has been ever "mindful of you, and blessed you!"

Be then, "mindful" of him, and "bless" him. Bear in remembrance your obligations to him; and go to him "in every time of need, both for mercy to pardon, and for grace to help! [Hebrews 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.16)." And bless him from your inmost souls, as David, specifying your respective characters, exhorts you, "Let Israel now say, that his mercy endures forever. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endures forever. Let them now, who fear the Lord, say, that his mercy endures forever! [Psalm 118:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.2-4)." Let this song be begun by you on earth, and you shall sing it to all eternity in Heaven.

#689

THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

**[Psalm 116:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.1-7)**

"I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!" The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The LORD protects the simple-hearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling!"

The abruptness of this Psalm shows that it was the fruit of much previous meditation; the writer of it had been "musing in his heart, until at last the fire kindled, and he spoke with his tongue." It begins, "I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy!" The fact is, that nothing so endears God to the souls of men as answers to prayer; nor does anything so encourage sinners to address him with unwearied importunity.

The two first verses of the Psalm are a kind of summary of the whole; setting forth in few words what he afterwards expatiates upon more at length; but though we shall, on this account, pass them over in our discussion, we shall not be unmindful of the resolution contained in them, but shall conclude our subject with commending it to your most serious attention.

The points which now call for our notice are:

I. The troubles which the Psalmist had endured.

We know not for certain what these were; but we are sure, that the Psalm was written after the ark had been brought up to mount Zion, and the worship of God had been permanently settled at Jerusalem, verse 18, 19; and therefore we apprehend, that is was written on occasion of David's deliverance from some overwhelming distress both of body and mind, resembling that specified in the sixth Psalm, [Psalm 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.2-3).

The terms used in our text might indeed be interpreted of death only; because the word "Hell" often means nothing more than the grave; but we rather think that terrors of conscience, on account of his sin committed in the matter of Uriah—had given a ten-fold poignancy to the fear of death, and that his experience was similar to that described in the 25th Psalm, where he says, "The troubles of my heart are enlarged; O bring me out of my distresses! Look upon my affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins! [Psalm 25:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.17-18)."

But whatever was the precise occasion of David's sorrows, it is manifest, that, sooner or later, we must all be brought into a situation wherein his language will be exactly suitable to us. "The sorrows of death" will shortly "encompass us," and "the pains of Hell," if we have not previously obtained a sense of reconciliation with God, will "get hold upon us;" and, in the contemplation of an approaching eternity, "we shall find trouble and sorrow," such as in our present state of carelessness and security we have no conception of.

O that we could but bring our hearers to realize that awful hour, when we shall look back upon our misspent hours with unavailing regret, and look forward to our great account with fear and trembling, wishing, if it were possible, that we might have a fresh term of probation allowed us, or that the hills and mountains might cover us from the face of our offended God!

Let all, even though, like David, they are monarchs upon their thrones, know, that the time must shortly arrive, when the things of time and sense will appear in all their real insignificance; and nothing will be deemed of any importance but the eternal welfare of the soul!

Whatever his troubles had been, we have no doubt respecting:

II. The means the Psalmist had used for his relief from them.

David had had recourse to prayer, "Then I called on the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech you, deliver my soul!"

Prayer is the proper remedy for all our troubles.

"Is any afflicted? let him pray;" says the inspired apostle. God himself says, "Call upon me in the time of trouble; and I will hear you; and you shall glorify me." Indeed, where else can we go with any hope of relief?

If it is the death of the body that we dread, man can do nothing for us, any farther than it shall please God to employ him as an instrument for our good.

If it is the death of the soul which we fear, who but God can help us? Who can interpose between a sinner and his Judge?

If we betake ourselves to a throne of grace, and "pray unto our God with strong crying and tears," we shall find that He "is able to save us from death;" but the best of men are at best, physicians of no value.

We must however, in our prayers, resemble David.

Behold what humility and fervor were manifested in this petition, "O Lord, I beseech you, deliver my soul!" Prayer does not consist in fluent or eloquent expressions, but in ardent desires of the soul; and it may as well be uttered in sighs and groans, as in the most energetic words that language can afford. "God knows the mind of the Spirit," by whose inspiration all acceptable supplications are suggested. Never was there a petition more pleasing to God than that of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Nor did any prayer prove more effectual for immediate relief than that recorded in our text.

Truly this is a comfortable consideration to the broken-hearted penitent; the greatness of his sorrows perhaps prevents the enlargement of his heart in prayer; but God estimates his prayers, not by their fluency, but by their sincerity; and that which is offered in indistinct and unutterable groans, is as intelligible and as acceptable to him, as if every request were offered in the most measured terms. Prayer thus offered, shall never go forth in vain.

This appears from,

III. The success of those means.

Most encouraging is the testimony which the Psalmist bears to the condescension and goodness of God.

Not a word intervenes between his petition for mercy and his acknowledgment of mercy received, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful." Here the Psalmist marks the union of justice and mercy in the dispensations of God's grace towards him; and that union is invariable, whenever we plead before him that great sacrifice which was made for the sins of men, and which has fully satisfied the justice of our God. Moreover, he represents this mercy as the common lot of all who in simplicity and godly sincerity implore it at God's hands, "The Lord preserves the simple," and will never allow one of them to perish. But then he brings it back again to his own experience, and acknowledges with heartfelt gratitude that God had received his prayer, and made him a most distinguished monument of his mercy.

Such is the testimony which every contrite and believing suppliant shall be able to bear.

Yes, justice is on the believer's side, as well as mercy. Whoever comes to God in the name of Christ, may plead, that all his debts have been discharged by his great Surety, and that all the glory of Heaven has been purchased for him by his Redeemer's blood. Through this infinitely meritorious atonement God is reconciled to man, and "the righteousness of Jehovah, no less than his mercy, is declared in the remission of sins, [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26);" so that, "if we humbly confess our sins, God will be faithful and just in forgiving our sins, and in cleansing us from all unrighteousness, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9)." Let the simple-hearted penitent rejoice in this assurance; and let every one labor from his own experience to say, "I was brought low, and he helped me."

In the close of our text we see,

IV. The improvement which the Psalmist made of his whole experience.

He determined henceforth to make God "the rest" of his soul.

Truly there is no rest for the soul in any other. We may renew our attempts to seek soul-rest in this lower world, but we shall find none, except in the ark of God. Indeed the great use of troubles is to bring us to a conviction of this truth; and, whatever we may have suffered from "the sorrows of death," or "the pains of Hell," we may bless and adore our God for the dispensation, if it disposes us at last to seek all our happiness in him.

To the same "Rest" must we also continually "return"

As the needle of a compass which has sustained some violent concussion will continue its tremulous motion until it returns to the pole again, so must our souls do, if at any time through the violence of temptation they be diverted for a season from their God. Not a moment's rest should we even wish to have, until we find it in him alone. In all his perfections we have "chambers into which we may enter," and in which we may enjoy security from every impending danger.

His omniscience will prevent surprise.

His omnipotence will defeat our most potent adversaries.

His love will comfort us under our most painful circumstances.

His faithfulness will preserve us even to the end.

Let our troubles then drive us to him, and our experience of past mercies determine us to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."

ADDRESS.

We now revert to the resolution announced by the Psalmist at the very beginning of the Psalm, "I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live!" This shows how justly he appreciated the Divine goodness; that he regarded it as an inexhaustible fountain, from whence the whole creation may incessantly "draw water with joy." The very command which God himself has given us, attests the same, and proves, that it is no less our privilege than our duty to "pray without ceasing," to "pray, and not faint."

O brethren, let every answer to prayer bring you back again more speedily to the throne of grace; and every communication of blessings to your souls make you more importunate for further blessings, until "your cup runs over," and you are "filled with all the fullness of God."

#690

GRATEFUL RECOLLECTIONS

**[Psalm 116:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.8-9)**

"You have delivered . . .  
 my soul from death,  
 my eyes from tears,  
 and my feet from falling.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living!"

It is justly said by David, in another Psalm, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein, [Psalm 111:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.2);" and great indeed they will appear, to all who endeavor to trace them even in the narrow sphere of their own experience.

David, it is true, had a greater variety of extraordinary incidents to enumerate, and of mercies to be thankful for, than almost any other person whatever; but still there is no such difference between his experience and that of other men, but that his complaints may be poured out by them, and his thanksgivings be adopted by them.

In the Psalm before us he seems to have been delivered from some heavy afflictions; and to have been raised from the depths of sorrow to an extraordinary elevation of peace and joy. He had been encompassed with the sorrows of death, and the pains of Hell had got hold upon him; but God, in answer to his prayers, had graciously delivered him from all his troubles.

In the words which we have just read, we see

I. David's review of past mercies.

1. God had delivered **David's soul from death**.

In its primary sense, these words refer to the death of the body. Saul had sought to the utmost of his power to destroy him; but God had on many occasions signally interposed for his protection, and had preserved him to the present hour. And have not we also reason to adore our God for the interpositions of his providence in our behalf? Though we have not been in similar circumstances with David, we have been exposed to many dangers, both seen and unseen; and have therefore just occasion to adopt before God the same expressions of reverential gratitude.

But we must surely include under these terms a deliverance from eternal death also. Compare [Psalm 86:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.13) and [Isaiah 38:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.17)." David was assured that God had "forgiven all his sins, [Psalm 103:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.3)," including those committed in the matter of Uriah, [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13); well therefore might he magnify the grace which had been exercised towards him.

And have not we also reason to magnify our God for having rescued our souls from perdition? True, many of us, it is to be feared, are yet in an unpardoned state; nevertheless, even they have cause to bless God that they have not long since been consigned over to everlasting and irremediable misery!

Millions of the human race have been cut off in their sins, though they had not, it may be, attained one half of the measure of iniquity that lies upon our souls; and yet they have been taken, and we left. O let us admire and adore this inscrutable mystery, and let us give unto God the glory due unto his name!

But it may be that our souls are in a pardoned state; and that God has "taken a live coal from off the altar, and applied it to our lips, saying, Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged! [Isaiah 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.6-7)." If so, what acknowledgments should we make? Truly there can be no circumstances whatever in which such people should not bless God from their very inmost souls, [1 Peter 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-4). This is the very commencement of an Epistle written to "Strangers who were scattered all the world over by cruel persecutions."

2. God had delivered **David's eyes from tears**.

David often found occasion to weep, either on his own account or on account of others, [Psalm 42:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.3), [2 Samuel 13:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 13.36); [2 Samuel 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.30); [2 Samuel 18:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 18.33). Indeed his whole life was tempestuous and full of trouble. What the particular affliction was from which he had now been delivered, we do not exactly know. If it was sickness and death, his tears must have proceeded, as Hezekiah's did, from an apprehension of the distraction and misery that were likely to ensue to the whole state by his removal from it at that time, [Isaiah 38:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.9-14). But whatever it was, his mind was now at ease in relation to it.

And are we at this time free from any great affliction? Surely we have reason to be thankful for it; for how numberless are the sources of grief from whence our whole souls may speedily be overwhelmed! In our own persons we are exposed to diseases and accidents every moment. In our relative connections too, how many occasions of sorrow are ever ready to arise! The misconduct of one, the unkindness of another, the misfortunes of a third, the death of one that was to us as our own souls. Alas! alas! it is a valley of tears that we are passing through, moaning or bemoaned every hour. Our very pleasures frequently become occasions of the bitterest pains. If then we have been kept for any time in a good measure of peaceful serenity, we may well account it a rich blessing for which we are bound to adore and magnify our God.

It is not from the dust that either our trials or our comforts spring; and, if God has dealt to us an abundance of earthly comfort, while so many thousands of our fellow-creatures are racked with pain, or bowed down with sorrows, we ought to acknowledge him as the author and giver of these distinguished privileges!

3. God had delivered **David's feet from falling**.

On more than one occasion, David's "feet had well near slipped." When urged to kill Saul, and when hastening to avenge himself on Nabal, he was on the brink of a dangerous precipice, from whence however it pleased God to deliver him.

And what a miracle of mercy is it, if our feet are kept! Consider with what innumerable snares and temptations we are beset on every side, and what corruptions reign in our own hearts, ready to precipitate us into any evil! Consider the deceitfulness of sin too, what pleasing and even innocent forms it will assume!

Consider also the malice and subtlety of our great adversary, who is going about continually as a roaring lion seeking to devour us!

Consider more particularly how many people of eminence in the religious world have fallen; a David, a Solomon, a Peter; O have not we reason to adore our God, if our feet have been kept from falling; more especially when we reflect, how near we have been to many grievous falls, when nothing but God's infinite mercy has held us up!

Let us look back then on these mercies given unto us, and, from the review, let us follow David in,

II. David's determination arising from it.

By "the land of the living" we understand this present world, [Psalm 27:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.13). [Isaiah 53:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.8), where alone there is any opportunity of making suitable returns to God. "The living, shall praise you, as I do this day," says, Hezekiah [Isaiah 38:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.19). As long as he should live, David determined, with God's help, to walk before God:

1. In a constant attendance on his ordinances.

This is particularly intended in the words of our text; twice is the idea expressly stated in the following, verses [Psalm 116:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12); [Psalm 116:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.14); [Psalm 116:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.17-19). And where should a person go to make his acknowledgments to God, but to His house, where the free-will offerings and thank-offerings of old were accustomed to be brought? A grateful heart will pant after these public opportunities of glorifying God, even "as the deer pants after the water-brooks, [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2);" and to be deprived of access to them will be a source of pain and grief, [Psalm 42:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.3-4). David envied the very swallows their liberty of access to the house of God, when he was kept at a distance from it, [Psalm 84:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.1-4).

Let us show our gratitude in the same way. And let not our attendance on his courts, after a recovery from sickness, be a mere prelude to our return to all the gaieties and follies of the world; but let our delight be in the worship of our God on earth, as a pledge and foretaste of our enjoyment of him in the eternal world.

2. Under an abiding sense of his presence.

To "set the Lord always before us" is the sure way to honor him. Whether we think of him or not, "he is always about our bed and about our paths, and spies out all our ways." Wherever we are, therefore, there should be that inscription which Hagar saw, "God You see me." O how circumspect would our conduct then be! How continually would that question recur to our minds, "What will my God approve?"

That this is the frame of mind which every child of God will cultivate, is beautifully represented by Paul in his address to servants; he tells them how the servant of God does act towards his heavenly Master, and proposes it as a pattern for them towards their earthly masters, [Ephesians 6:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.5-8); Let us "not be mere eye-servants, as men-pleasers," but exert ourselves at all times to please our God, as servants do under the immediate eye of their master.

3. In a cheerful obedience to his commands.

This is to walk before God in deed and in truth, [1 Kings 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 2.3-4); and to produce this, is the very end of all God's mercies towards us. Surely, if we are in any measure sensible of our obligations to God, we shall not account any of "his commandments grievous." We shall not wish so much as one of them to be relaxed, but shall attend to all of them without partiality and without hypocrisy. Happy would it be for us if more of this gratitude were found among us. Happy would it be if the love which God has shown to us in Christ Jesus constrained us to live altogether unto God; so that we could make the same appeal to him that Hezekiah did, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight, [Isaiah 38:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.3)." This is the surest test of our integrity, and the most acceptable expression of our gratitude to God.

In our **reflections** on this subject, we cannot but view in it abundant matter:

1. For our **humiliation**.

How many mercies have we received, yet never stood amazed at the goodness of our God! Were it only this, that our souls are not consigned over to everlasting death, we should have cause to bless our God day and night. Only reflect a moment, how dreadful it would have been to be cut off in our sins, and to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where there is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! Yet who among us has not richly deserved it? who has not been in constant danger of it from day to day? Our sins have been more in number than the hairs of our head; yet not a thousandth part so great as they would have been, if we had been left to carry into act all the evil dispositions of our hearts. Truly if we have not run into the same enormities as others, it is God, and God alone, who has made the difference between us.

What shall we say then to the insensibility which we have manifested under all these stupendous mercies? Are we not ashamed? Have we not reason to be ashamed, yes, and to abase ourselves before God in dust and ashes? O let us remember that ingratitude is a sin of the most crimson dye! [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21); and that, if we will not notice as we ought the operations of God's hands—then his loving-kindness will before long be shut up in everlasting displeasure, [Psalm 28:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 28.5).

2. For our **encouragement**.

To the evil and to the unthankful have all these mercies been given; What then shall not be done for us, if we will seek after God in sincerity and truth? Surely these present blessings shall be only as the drop before the shower; they shall be a prelude to that blessedness, "where there shall be no more death nor sorrow, nor sin, but where all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes for ever! [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4)." God offers himself to every one of us, as a Covenant God; he says to each of us, as he did to Abraham of old, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be perfect! [Genesis 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.1)." In Christ Jesus he is already reconciled to his redeemed people. He now requires that we come to him through Christ, embracing his offered mercies, and yielding up ourselves to him as those that are alive from the dead. O that he may so draw us, that we may run after him; and so subdue us to the obedience of faith, that we may become a peculiar people, zealous of good works!

#691

HOW TO REQUITE THE LORD FOR HIS MERCIES

**[Psalm 116:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12-14)**

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me! I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people."

The influence of faith on our eternal salvation is obvious to all who have any just views of the Gospel; but its operation on the mind in this present life, and its efficacy to produce peace and holiness, are by no means generally understood.

In this view however the Psalm before us is peculiarly instructive. David, when his faith failed him, overlooked all the mercies that he had received at the Lord's hands, and rashly concluded, that all which had been declared to him respecting the purpose of God to establish him on the throne of Israel, was false, "I said in my haste, all men are liars!" But, when his faith was strengthened, he no longer gave way to such querulous expressions and desponding fears; on the contrary, he then was full of peace and joy; and with the liveliest emotions of love and gratitude, exclaimed, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" That we may be brought to this happy state of mind, and may be led to abound in praise and thanksgiving, let us contemplate,

I. The benefits which our God has conferred upon us.

On such an inexhaustible subject as this, we can do no more than suggest a few leading thoughts, which may be more largely prosecuted in our secret retirement. To contemplate them in all their fullness will be the blissful employment of eternity. Let us notice:

1. God's blessings of **creation**.

How distinguished is our condition above all other creatures upon the face of the earth! In bodily powers, it is true, we are exceeded by many; who have not only far greater strength and agility than we, but their senses also, of sight, and hearing, and taste, and smelling, and of feeling also, far more exquisite than ours. But the endowment of reason elevates us far above them all, and puts them all, in some degree at least, in subjection under our feet.

In the animals indeed is instinct, and that too in such perfection as almost to border on the province of reason.

But in us is a capacity to comprehend things of spiritual and eternal import, and an ability to know, to love, to enjoy, to glorify our God. Say whether these be not mercies which call for the devoutest gratitude at our hands?

Nor is it a small matter that we have been brought into the world at such a time, when the light of God's truth is so clearly seen, and in such a place as Britain, where it shines forth, as it were, in meridian splendor. We might have been born of Mohammedan or Heathen parents; or even in our own country have been so situated, as to hear but little of Christ and his salvation. Surely we should not overlook these great benefits, nor forget what a mercy it is to live in this present day, when there exists such an ardent zeal for the propagation of the Gospel, and such unprecedented efforts are made for its diffusion throughout the world.

2. God's blessings of **Providence**.

Innumerable are the deliverances which we have all received from seen and unseen dangers. Millions have been taken out of the world before they had attained our age; and it is to God's gracious care alone we owe it, that we have yet "space given us for repentance," and time afforded us for securing the things belonging to our peace.

How different might be our condition from what it is! We might be so destitute of every comfort, and so oppressed with pain and anguish, that our very existence, instead of being a blessing, might be a burden and a curse! We all, it is true, have trials of some kind or other; but we all have our consolations also; and those who have most afflictions, have in themselves an evidence, how greatly we are all indebted to our God for that measure of consolation which is given to mitigate our sorrows, and how infinitely short of our deserts is any trouble which is allotted to us in this world.

3. God's blessings of **Redemption**.

But how shall we speak of this? Who can "comprehend the height and depth of God's love" displayed in the salvation of his people? That God should so pity us as to give his only-begotten Son to die for us! that he should lay our iniquities on him, as our sin-bearer, and thus make a way for the display of all his own glorious perfections in the salvation of man! What shall we say to this? It is "a love that surpasses knowledge!" Every part of it is described as far exceeding all finite comprehension.

The "riches" of grace contained in it, are "unsearchable!" The "peace" flowing from it, "surpasses understanding!"

The "joy"imparted by it, is "unspeakable and full of glory!"

The whole mystery of salvation . . .  
 as planned by the Father in election,  
 as accomplished by the Son in redemption,  
 as applied by the Spirit in regeneration,  
 as experienced in the souls of the elect,  
is so great, that we cannot contemplate it a moment, without exclaiming, "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)."

Having thus briefly touched upon the mercies of our God, let us proceed to mark,

II. The sense we should have of God's mercies.

It is not any slight acknowledgment that befits us:

1. We should contemplate God's mercies with **overwhelming gratitude**.

This is implied in the Psalmist's expression, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" It is not a calm inquiry, but the language of a heart oppressed, as it were, with a load of obligation. A man who can speak calmly on such a subject, nay, I had almost said, a man who can speak at all upon it—feels it not as he ought; it is too big for utterance; as, in a mind overwhelmed with conscious unworthiness, "the Spirit of God makes intercession with groans which cannot be uttered"—so methinks, if we had a just apprehension of the benefits conferred upon us, our sense of them would be expressed rather in a way of silent adoration, than of verbal acknowledgment.

We do not mean by this, that men should not sing praises to their God, and tell of all his wondrous works; for it is our bounden duty to celebrate them to the utmost of our power, [Isaiah 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.4-6); but, in our present state of darkness and ignorance, it is rarely given to men so fully to behold all the wonders of God's love, as to have their organs of vision blinded by the overwhelming splendor of the light; we "see at present only in part;" we "behold things only, as in a mirror, darkly." As "Moses put a veil upon his face" to hide from the admiring Israelites that glory which they were "unable steadfastly to behold," so God has, in mercy, veiled even his goodness from us, because we are incapable of supporting the ineffable effulgence of his glory. Of what we do see, we must say, with Job, "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him! but the thunder of his power" (we may add too, the riches of his goodness) "who can understand? [Job 26:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 26.14)."

2. We should contemplate God's mercies with **practical self-devotion**.

However overwhelmed our minds may be, there must be in us a determination of heart to render to the Lord all the service of which he has made us capable. Our gratitude to him must be, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." His love must have a constraining influence on our souls; it must "constrain us no longer to live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15)." Every blessing we enjoy must lead us to Him, who of his great mercy and bounty has bestowed it on us; and the consideration of redeeming love especially must animate us to a total surrender of ourselves, in body, soul, and spirit, to the service of our God! 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

As, under the Law, the slaughtered victims were wholly burnt by fire upon the altar, so, under the Gospel, must we offer ourselves up wholly to the Lord "as living sacrifices." This is nothing more than our reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). "We are not our own; we are bought with a price; and therefore we should glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)."

But let us somewhat more distinctly consider,

III. The way in which we should requite God's mercies.

The example of the pious Jews is very instructive.

The Jews were encouraged under their troubles to betake themselves to God, and to make vows unto the Most High; and these vows they were required strictly to perform. On paying their vows to their heavenly Benefactor, they presented certain sacrifices, of which they and their families were permitted to partake, in remembrance of God's mercies towards them, and as an expression of their gratitude to him, [Leviticus 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.12). [Deuteronomy 12:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.6-7); [Deuteronomy 12:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.17-18). On these occasions, it was common for the master of the family to close the feast by taking a cup of wine, and drinking of it, first himself, and afterwards all his family in succession; and then to close the whole with a hymn. To this custom it should seem that David refers in other Psalms, [Psalm 66:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.13-16); [Psalm 107:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.22), as well as in the passage before us. In the same way, our blessed Lord adopted it as a suitable method of commemorating the wonders of his dying love, [Matthew 26:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.27). He took a cup, and blessed it, and gave it to his disciples, that they, and all his followers, to the very end of time, might drink it in remembrance of his blood shed for the remission of their sins, [1 Corinthians 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.25).

After this example we should pay our vows, and "receive the cup of salvation," or, as that used by the Jews was called, "the cup of deliverances".

Is it asked, What sacrifice are we to offer? I answer, The sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15). "The calves of our lips" are far more acceptable to God than all the burnt-offerings that ever were offered, [Psalm 50:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.13-14) with [Hosea 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.2).

And surely the sacramental cup, of which every believer should frequently partake, should ever remind us of all the saving mercies we have ever received; and be taken by us as a memorial of God's unbounded love to us, and of our sincere surrender of ourselves to him. In these expressions of our love and gratitude we should have all the powers of our souls called forth, "all that is within us should bless the name of our God;" and the entire devotion of ourselves to his service should bear witness to our sincerity before him. Never are we to be restrained by fear or shame. No, we must pay our vows "in the presence of all his people." If we are ashamed of Christ, what can we expect, but that he will be ashamed of us? But, "if we confess him before men, then he will also confess us in the presence of his Father and his holy angels."

Here then is the service which we are to render unto God in return for all his benefits; we are to confess him, to magnify him, to adore him, to give up ourselves to him as his redeemed people, to live altogether by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving all out of his fullness, and improving all for the honor of his name. So entirely should we be the Lord's, that "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to his glory! [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31)."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who have never yet instituted this inquiry.

Alas! how many have never made any other use of God's mercies, but to render them the means of self-destruction, and instruments of dishonoring their God!

Has he given them abundance! They have employed it in riot and excess.

Has he given to them health and strength? They have turned these blessings into an occasion of more unbridled license for sin.

Has he bestowed intellectual powers upon them? They have perverted these to justify their evil ways, and to dispute the authority of God.

The very Gospel itself, they have abused as sanctioning their presumptuous hopes, and as affording reason for dissipating all fear of God's displeasure.

Ah, brethren! what will be the end of these things? "Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise people?" How will you answer it at the last day?

When your Judge shall put the question, "What could I have done more for my vineyard than I did? What excuse will you offer for bringing forth only wild grapes? [Isaiah 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.1-4)." Do but think of these things, before it is too late. But if you will not lay these things to heart, then know assuredly, that, if you will not render unto the Lord according to his works of mercy, he will render unto you according to your aggravated iniquities!

2. Those who profess to feel their obligations to their God.

Examine, I beseech you, the returns which you have made; do they not "fill you with shame and confusion of face?" Are you not perfectly astonished at your own ingratitude? O! see what need there is to walk humbly before God. But yet, do not despond. Your "God is able to make all grace abound towards you;" and, if you call upon him, "he will give you more grace," even grace sufficient for you, so that you shall be able to "render to him, in some measure at least, according to the benefits he has conferred upon you."

You see how he wrought in David, and in his holy Apostles. Is his arm shortened, that it cannot reach to you? Arise, and bless your God; walk joyfully before him, "let your hearts be lifted up in his ways;" come, and take the cup of salvation; and, as one great family, hand it round, each, as it were, to the other, that all of you may be encouraged, and all be comforted, and all be strengthened.

"Now," even now, take the blessed cup into your hands; and drink of it "in the presence of all his people;" yes, drink, and live forever. And inquire with yourselves, inquire of each other, yes, inquire of God himself, what you can do for him; and let your capacity for his service be the only measure of your exertion.

#692

THE DEATH OF SAINTS PRECIOUS

**[Psalm 116:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.15)**

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints!"

The meaning of these words will be best marked from the occasion on which we suppose them to have been uttered. The Psalm appears to have been written after Absalom's rebellion. Most imminent were the dangers from which David had been delivered. For this mercy he renders thanks; and acknowledges, to the praise of his heavenly Protector, that, while his own son had sought his life, and instigated multitudes to seek his destruction, God had interposed for his deliverance, and had inflicted merited judgments on his enemies. So precious had God accounted his death, that he would make those to pay dearly who had labored to effect it; or, as it is said in another Psalm, "He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious to him! [Psalm 72:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.14)."

From the words which I have read, I shall take occasion to show,

I. In what light God regards the death of the saints.

We are not to understand that the death of his saints is pleasing to God, but rather, that he places a high value on them, and that he will allow none to accomplish their death with impunity.

1. So precious is their death, that God watches over them to prevent it.

Incessant is his care over his Church; as he has said, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day, [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.4)." He assures us that "no weapon that is formed against his people shall prosper, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17)." So that, as has been often said, "God's people are immortal, until their work is done." Not that they are at liberty to tempt the Lord by rushing needlessly into danger; but, if called by God to perform any duty, they have nothing to fear. David's deliverances were numberless, as were those also of the Apostle Paul. Our Lord himself, too, was encompassed for years by those who sought his life; but none could prevail against him, until "his hour was come." As weak as his people are, even "as lambs in the midst of wolves," none can effect their ruin, "none can ever pluck them out of his hands." "There is an appointed time" for every one of them to die; and, as they must wait, so must their enemies also wait, until that time is come.

2. So precious is their death, that God will come forth to avenge it.

God does allow his people to be assaulted, and to be put to death; but he will call their enemies to a severe account for all that they do against the lowest of his saints. It is said, "He who touches you, touches the apple of his eye! [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)." We well know the force of this figure, if but a mote gets into our eye; and we may therefore understand from thence how God feels when any of his people are assaulted. He has told us, that "It would have been better for any man that a millstone were hanged round his neck, and that he were cast into the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of God's little ones!"

We see, in the history of David, how Ahithophel suffered for his treachery, and Absalom for his rebellion; and sooner or later shall every man who, either in a way of direct assault or of silent contempt, harms the people of the Lord, surely "give account thereof in the day of judgment [1 Peter 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.4-5)."

3. So precious is their death, that God will never allow it, until he has accomplished his good work within them.

To every one of his people has God assigned his proper work; to some, as to the dying thief, little more is given than an opportunity of confessing Christ; to others, as to Paul and John, are long and arduous labors allotted; but the times of all are in God's hands; and he will enable every one of them to say, "Father, I have glorified you on earth; I have finished the work which you gave me to do, [John 17:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.4)."

To his blood-thirsty enemies our Savior said, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again!" And even to the most potent among them we may say, "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above." Men may think they have accomplished their purposes; as when Peter was kept in prison until the very night preceding his intended execution; or as when Paul had been stoned, and left for dead. But "there is no counsel or might against the Lord." He will make "the wrath of man to praise him; and the remainder of it," which would counteract his purposes, "he will restrain."

Such being God's estimate of his people's death, we may see,

II. In what light we also should regard the death of the godly.

However we may encourage souls on their removal to the eternal world, we cannot but regard their death:

1. As an event to be deplored.

The world little thinks how much they are indebted to the saints. It is for their sakes that the world itself is kept in existence. If their number were complete, and their graces arrived at the measure ordained for them, we have reason to think that an end would be put to the present state of things, as we know there will be at the day of judgment. The usefulness of some who are in very conspicuous stations is seen and acknowledged; but it is hard to conceive how much good may be done by the lowest saint, through the prayers which he offers up from time to time.

The prayer of Moses repeatedly saved the whole Jewish nation, when for their iniquities God had determined to sweep them all away.

Abraham prevailed, to the full extent of his petitions, in behalf of Sodom and all the cities of the plain.

And who can tell what blessings the prayers of God's people have brought on our guilty land, or what blessings may be obtained through the most humble individual among them? As a public loss, therefore, I think the removal of any saint may be deplored. As it respects him personally, we may indeed, from a variety of circumstances, be led to rejoice in it; because he rests from his labors, and may therefore be accounted blessed; but as far as the work of God on earth and the benefit of mankind are concerned, his death may be regarded as a ground of general regret.

2. As a dispensation to be carefully improved.

In the death of a saint, God himself calls upon us to inquire, whether we, if we had been taken, should have been found ready. He bids us to "work while it is day, since the night is coming when no man can work." He leads us to consider the blessedness of dying in the Lord; and bids us to "be followers of those who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who make light of death.

It is surprising how little effect the death of any saint produces on the minds of survivors; and how speedily any impression wears away. The conversation of mourners assembled to attend a funeral gives us a melancholy picture of the human mind, and of the extreme indifference with which the concerns of eternity are regarded by us. But, brethren, will death appear so light a matter when we shall have entered into the eternal world? Is there one of us who will not wish that he had labored far move to prepare for his great account? I beg you, trifle not with your souls; but know assuredly, that one soul is of more value than the whole world.

2. Those who estimate death according to its real importance.

You well know the true value of life. Its great use is, to prepare for death. Let every hour be pressed into the service of your God. Let everything be valued according to its bearing on eternity. Above all, let the Savior be dear to you. It is He who has taken away the sting of death, and authorised you to number it among your richest treasures. Through his sin-atoning blood you may look forward to death and judgment with far other eyes than they can be viewed by the ungodly world. You may regard death as the commencement of eternal life, and the very gate of Heaven. Only take care, therefore, that in your experience it be "Christ to live," and then you shall assuredly and that it will "be gain to die!"

#693

THE GENTILES CALLED TO PRAISE GOD

Psalm 117

"Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!"

This is the shortest of all the Psalms; but it is by no means the least interesting; the energy with which it is expressed abundantly marks the importance of the truths contained in it, and the feelings with which it should be read by us. The same opinions are surely contained in many other Psalms; but to a mind that is rightly disposed, they are ever new; they need no embellishment to adorn them, no eloquence to set them forth. If any man can hear or reflect upon them without emotion, the fault is in himself alone.

I. Let us consider the Psalm **in a general view**.

Here is a call to the whole world to praise and adore their God. Those perfections which they are more especially called to celebrate are:

1. The greatness of his mercy.

Reflect on his sparing mercy. Consider the state of the whole world, which has so cast off their allegiance to God, that "he is not in all their thoughts!" Consider the inconceivable mass of iniquity that has been accumulating now nearly six thousand years; and yet we are spared! Once indeed God destroyed the world; but only once. On some few occasions God has marked his indignation against sin; but on very few. An Achan, an Uzzah, an Ananias, have been set up as witnesses for God, that he hates iniquity; but these only serve the more strikingly to illustrate the astonishing forbearance of our God! Let every Christian look back upon his own personal transgressions, and then say whether he himself is not an astonishing monument of God's forbearance.

But if we so admire the sparing mercy of our God, what shall we say of his redeeming mercy? What words can we ever find sufficient to express the wonders of God's love, in substituting his own Son, his co-equal, co-eternal Son, in our place, and laying the iniquities of a ruined world on him? Here we are altogether lost in wonder. The idea of redemption is so vast, that we cannot grasp it. We assent to it; we believe it; we trust in it; but it so far exceeds all our comprehension, that it appears rather like "a cunningly-devised fable," than a reality.

We see a little of the suitableness and sufficiency of this salvation; but only "as in a looking-glass darkly;" it is still a wonder that we view it at all; spelling it out, as it were, from a few scattered hints, and guessing at what we cannot comprehend. The freeness with which it is offered also, no less surpasses knowledge.

By the way in which God himself follows us with offers, and entreaties, it should seem almost as if his happiness, rather than ours, depended on our acceptance of it. The continuance of these offers, made as they are from year to year to people who only pour contempt upon them, and trample on that adorable Savior who shed his blood for them. O! what an emphasis does this give to that expression in our text, "His merciful kindness is great towards us!"

Should not the whole universe adore our God for this?

2. The inviolability of his truth.

Were his truth considered in reference to his threatenings, it would be a solemn subject indeed; but we are called to notice it at present only in connection with his promises. All the mercy which God was pleased to grant to man, he has made over to us by an everlasting covenant, which was confirmed with an oath, and ratified with the blood of his only dear Son. There is not anything which fallen man can want, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity, which has not been made the subject of a distinct promise. And who ever heard of one single promise failing him who trusted in it? Who ever heard of one sinner rejected, who came to God in the way prescribed?

To the Jewish nation many specific promises were made; Did anyone of them fail? Did not Joshua, after the final settlement of the Jews in Canaan, bear testimony for God in this respect, in the presence of the whole assembled nation, and appeal to them for the truth of his assertions? [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14). And have not all of you, who have ever rested in, and pleaded, God's gracious promises, been constrained to bear a similar testimony in his behalf?

Let the whole world then adore and magnify the Lord on this ground; and never be weary of acknowledging, that "his mercy endures forever. See Psalm 136, where it is repeated twenty-six times in as many verses."

Let us now proceed to consider the Psalm,

II. Let us consider the Psalm with a more immediate reference to the Gentile world.

The Psalm is in reality a prophecy; and so important a prophecy, that Paul expressly quotes one part of it, [Romans 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.11), and gives, as it were, an explanation of the remainder, [Romans 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.8-9), where God's truth and mercy are both specified, as illustrated and confirmed by Christ.

It declares the calling of the Gentiles.

In this sense it has been interpreted, even by some of the Jews themselves; and we are sure that this is its true import, because an inspired Apostle has put this construction upon it. And are not we ourselves evidences of its truth? Are not we Gentiles? Has not God's mercy reached unto us? Are not his promises also fulfilled to us? The promise to Abraham was, that "in him, and in his seed, should all the nations of the earth be blessed;" and this promise was made to him while he was yet uncircumcised, in order that the interest which we uncircumcised Gentiles had in it might be more fully manifest, [Romans 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.11).

Behold then, we are living witnesses both of God's mercy and truth! His promises are fulfilled to us, yes, and are yet daily fulfilling before our eyes. The blessings of salvation are poured down upon us in rich abundance. The Church is daily enlarging on every side of us. Both at home and abroad the Gospel is running and glorified, to an extent that has never been seen since the Apostolic age. And the time for its universal diffusion through the whole earth is manifestly drawing near. We have seen enough with our eyes to assure us, that the fuller accomplishment of God's promises may be expected in due season; and that, at the appointed hour, "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our God, and of his Christ."

In this view, all the Gentile world are called upon to bless and praise their God.

You, who are here assembled, arise and praise your God. Consider what mercy has been shown to you; consider what truth has been displayed towards you. Arise, I say; yes, again and again would I repeat it: Arise and praise your God!

And, you remotest nations of the earth, O that our voice could reach to you! O that you knew your obligations to your God, and the blessings that are in reserve for you! The Savior was called, "The Desire of all nations;" and such indeed he ought to be. Well! if you know him not, and consequently rejoice not in him, we will rejoice for you; for he is coming to you; the messengers of the Lord Almighty are going forth into every quarter of the globe; and the word that reveals him to you is translating, in purpose and intention at least, into all the languages of the earth; and we anticipate with joy the time, when all the heathen shall serve him, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

ADDRESS.

1. Are there any among you who have no disposition to praise the Lord?

Alas! there are too many, who have no delight in this blessed work, and have never spent one hour in it in all their lives! Ah! wretched ingrate! What do you think of yourselves?

Are you not blind, when you cannot see the perfections of your God?

Are you not base, when you can receive such mercies at God's hands, and never acknowledge them?

Are you not brutish, yes, worse than brutish? for "the ox and donkey know their owner; but you know not," nor acknowledge, your Creator, your Benefactor, your Redeemer.

See how far you are from being a holy Christian! Tell me not of your moral qualities; you are base ungrateful creatures; and, if a fellow-creature were to treat you as you treat your God, you would abhor him utterly. O repent, and embrace the mercy that is yet offered to you! Or else you will find that He, who is true to his promises, will be true to his threatenings also.

2. Are there among you some who desire to praise the Lord?

We believe it; we rejoice in it; we pray to God to increase their number a hundredfold. But do you not find that your thanks and praises are infinitely short of what the occasion for them demands? Yes, methinks there is nothing so humbling to a Christian as the services which he attempts to render to his God. However, still go on to serve him as you can, when you cannot serve him as you would.

To quicken your zeal, contemplate much and deeply the greatness of God's mercy to you, and the inviolability of his truth. God has designed that such contemplations should be a rich source of comfort to yourselves, as they will be also of love and gratitude to him. And, while your own souls are filled with these divine affections, endeavor to diffuse the sacred flame, that all around you, and, if possible, all the nations of the world, may be stirred up to render unto God the praises due unto his name.

#694

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST, A GROUND OF CONFIDENCE

**[Psalm 118:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.27-28)**

"The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you!"

However plainly this Psalm refers to David, we are sure that a greater than David is here. The words as applied to David, convey an exceedingly grand and important meaning. He had met with many obstacles in his advancement to the throne of Israel. Oftentimes had his life been sought by Saul; and since the death of Saul there were many formidable conspiracies against him. No sooner was he made king over Israel, than the Philistines sought, and that repeatedly, to destroy him, [2 Samuel 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.17-18); [2 Samuel 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.22); and it was only through the special intervention of God himself that he was able to prevail against them. It appears that many other of the surrounding nations also conspired against him verse 10-12. Four times does he repeat, and, in the last, with a very expressive simile, "They compassed me about." but through the same Almighty power he was enabled to subdue them. At last, after more than seven years opposition from all the tribes of Israel, [2 Samuel 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.4-5), he was firmly fixed upon the throne, and "the stone which had been so long rejected by the builders, was made the head cornerstone, verse 22."

This event reflected great "light" upon all God's purposes respecting him. Darkness had hung over him for a long period; but it was now dispelled; and he saw clearly these two important truths:

That God's counsel, by whoever opposed, shall stand.

That those who trust in the Lord, however tried they may be, shall never be confounded.

But, as we said, a greater than David is here. It was generally acknowledged among the Jews themselves that David was a type of the Messiah, and that this Psalm had an especial reference to Him who was in due time to sit upon the throne of David. Hence the acclamations which were used by the people on the occasion of David's installation, were used by the Jews in reference to Christ, [Matthew 21:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.9); and he vindicated their conduct in this particular [Matthew 21:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.16); and afterwards appealed to this very Psalm in confirmation of his predictions respecting his rejection by them, and his subsequent elevation to the throne of David, [Matthew 21:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.42).

In like manner, after the death and resurrection of Christ, Peter, "when he was filled with the Holy Spirit," expressly applied to Christ this very passage, and affirmed in the presence of all the Rulers and Elders of Israel that it was accomplished in the exaltation of that Jesus whom they had crucified, [Acts 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.8); [Acts 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.11).

Now in this event, the exaltation of Christ to the throne of glory, God has indeed "showed us light;" and it will be a profitable subject for our meditation at this time, if we consider:

I. The light which God has shown us.

Previous to the resurrection of Christ, all was darkness; the disciples themselves doubted whether they had not been deceived in their expectations respecting him. But from that event, and his consequent ascension to the right hand of God, we learn infallibly,

1. The efficacy of Christ's **atonement**.

Had he not risen, we might have conceived of him as a great Prophet indeed, but as nothing more than a prophet, who, like multitudes who had preceded him, sealed his doctrines with his own blood. But he had spoken of his death as a ransom to be paid for the souls of men; and how could we have known that that ransom was accepted, if his resurrection, which he himself taught his disciples to look forward to as the proof and evidence of his acceptance, had not been effected?

But when we see that he did rise from the dead, and ascended to Heaven in the presence of his disciples, and sent the Holy Spirit according to his Word to bear testimony concerning him—then there is no room left for doubt; we are perfectly sure that his offering was accepted by the Father, and that by his obedience unto death he has wrought out eternal redemption for us! [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4); [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34).

2. The sufficiency of Christ's **grace**.

Even when our blessed Lord was on earth, the whole creation, animate and inanimate, terrestrial and infernal, were obedient to his will; how much more therefore, now that he is exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and has all fullness treasured up in him for the benefit of his people, must he be able to "do all things which we call upon him for!" If he says, as he did to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you"—then we may safely adopt Paul's language, and say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." If all enemies are put under his feet, they shall assuredly be put under ours also; even "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly."

3. The excellency of Christ's **salvation**.

Behold what has taken place with respect to him! He is exalted to the throne of God, and possessed of all the glory which he had with the Father before the worlds were made. The same glory is reserved for us also, [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29), and a participation of that very throne which his Father has given to him, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

Believer, contemplate all the glory and felicity of your exalted Head; and then see what is prepared for all his members, "your body shall be like unto his glorious body;" your soul shall be transformed into his perfect image; and all the glory which his Father has given him, shall be your inalienable and everlasting inheritance! [John 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.22). [1 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4).

What a glorious light is this! Let it lead us to contemplate:

II. The returns which it calls for at our hands.

Surely such discoveries as are here made to us should call forth our devoutest affections; they should lead us,

1. To surrender ourselves entirely to God.

The sacrifices which David and Solomon offered unto God were almost without number, [1 Chronicles 29:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.21). [1 Kings 8:62-63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.62-63); but the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit, or of a devout and grateful heart, outweighs them all! [Psalm 50:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.13-14); [Psalm 51:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.16-17). Whether the sacrifices were ever "bound to the horns of the altar," we are not informed. But sure enough our hearts need to be bound; for they are ever ready to "start aside as a broken bow," and "to backslide from God as a wandering heifer, "and we should labor incessantly to say with David, "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise."

The example of Abraham may assist us in this particular. The offering of his son was a dark dispensation; but, when God arrested the arm of Abraham, and forbad him to inflict the fatal wound, a light beamed in upon his soul; he saw a risen Savior presented to him under the image of his restored son; and instantly "he took the ram which was caught in the thicket, and offered him up for burnt-offering in the stead of his son, [Genesis 22:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.13)."

Let the sight of a risen Savior operate in like manner upon us; let us take the offering which all of us have at hand, and which we know will be pleasing to the Lord, even "the offering of a willing heart," and let us present it a living sacrifice to God, as our reasonable and most delightful service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1) with [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15).

2. To rejoice and glory in God as our portion forever.

Like Paul, we may say of Christ, "He has loved me, and given himself for me." Indeed, without this appropriation of God and his blessings to our own souls, we can never attain to a joyful and thankful spirit; but it is the privilege of every believer to say of Christ, "He is my friend, He is my beloved!" God approves of this language, by whoever used, provided only it is used in sincerity and truth, "You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, I will exalt you." If under the Old Testament, believers could say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his!" then much more may we regard him as "the strength of our heart, and our portion forever."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are **yet**in darkness.

Long was the night with which David was enclosed, insomuch that he sometimes feared he should "one day perish by the hands of Saul;" yet at last the day dawned upon him, and "God showed him light."

In the same way, dark were the dispensations towards our blessed Lord, until in his resurrection and ascension the true light was made to shine.

Do not let any of us then indulge desponding fears; let us know assuredly, that "the counsel of God shall stand," and that "those who trust in him shall never be confounded." Indeed even "in our darkness, the Lord will be a light unto us;" and soon "our light shall rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noon-day."

2. To those who have been "brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light".

Happy, happy you, who behold a risen Savior, and see the fullness which you have in him! You may be sweetly assured, that, as he is able, so also he is engaged to "save your souls to the uttermost, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for you."

But let this light have its proper influence upon your minds. "Walk as children of the light" and of the day; yes, "walk in the light, as he is in the light." If you do indeed "behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," "it is God the Lord who has shown it to you;" and "you, as his peculiar people, are called to show forth his praises! [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." Do this then in the way before prescribed; give up yourselves wholly unto him; and take him as your only, your everlasting, portion!

#695

PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED

**[Psalm 119:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.4-6)**

"You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands."

It is impossible to read the Psalm before us and not see that true religion is altogether of a practical nature. Doubtless, in the first instance, the Inspired Volume reveals to us a way of reconciliation with our offended God, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; but its ultimate object is, to bring our hearts into a conformity to the mind and will of God. In the words before us we see all that is most interesting to the child of God:

I. The believer's indispensable duties.

God commands us, not only to return to him in a way of penitence, but to walk before him in a way of holy obedience.

This he requires throughout the Holy Scriptures.

He requires it by Moses, Deuteronomy, 5:29;  
and the prophets, Jeremiah 7:22-23;  
by Christ also, Matthew 28:20;  
and his holy Apostles, [1 Peter 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15-16).

Indeed, to bring us to holiness of heart and life was the very end for which he gave his only-begotten Son, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8), and for which Christ himself died, [Titus 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.4). And every command is enforced with an authority which it is at our peril to disregard, [James 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10-12).

He requires, too, that in this duty we exert ourselves with "diligence".

This is again and again insisted on, [Deuteronomy 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.13); [Deuteronomy 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18); [Deuteronomy 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.22), both in relation to the keeping of the heart, [Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.23), and to the whole of our deportment through life, [2 Peter 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10); [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14). We are particularly called to "set our heart" to this work, [Deuteronomy 32:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.46), that we may understand it in all its parts, and perform it in its utmost extent. In a word, "This is the will of God, even our sanctification, [1 Thessalonians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.3)."

How the true saint stands affected towards his duties, may here be seen in:

II. The believer's impassioned desire.

The genuiness of a Christian is seen far more in his **desires**than in his **actual attainments**.

He feels and mourns over his manifold defects.

It might be supposed, that the more holy any man were, the more self-sufficient he would be; but the very reverse of this is the truth; for, the more holy any man is, the clearer and more enlarged are his views of God's holy law; and, consequently, the deeper his sense of his short-comings and defects, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9). Hence he complains with Paul, "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)."

He desires the gift of God's Holy Spirit, to remedy these defects.

He knows, by sad experience how liable he is to be deceived, even while he is endeavoring to do the will of God. "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked! [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9)," and easily betrayed into error, by its prejudices, its passions, its interests.

And sin itself also is deceitful, putting on, in ten thousand instances, the garb of holiness, and the semblance of duty, [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13).

And Satan is a subtle adversary, that has at command ten thousand wiles and devices, whereby to ensnare him! [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3).

What then, shall the Christian do? He can look only to God, for his Holy Spirit to guide him aright and to direct his steps, [Proverbs 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.6). Hence, from his inmost soul, he prays, "Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip! [Psalm 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.5)." Yes, "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ! 2 Thessalonians 3:5."

But, in the midst of all his troubles, we may behold:

III. The believer's assured encouragement.

Were he left to himself, he well knows that he must perish. But "his hope is in the Lord his God."

That which is required of him, is, to be upright before God.

God "requires truth in the inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6)." However defective we are in our attainments, there must be no insincerity in our desires. We must "account all God's commandments concerning all things to be right, and must hate every false way, verse 128." In our regard to them, there must be "no partiality, no hypocrisy, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17);" the smallest commandment must not be considered as light, [Matthew 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.19), nor the greatest commandment be deemed "grievous, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3)." "Lord, what will you have me to do, [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6)" must be his daily prayer; and to fulfill every command of God, the constant habit of his mind.

With this one acquisition, he has nothing to fear.

"God will uphold the upright man, [Psalm 37:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.17)." Satan may tempt him; his own indwelling corruptions may assault him; and he may at times be so harassed, us to be almost at his wit's end! [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9);" but "God will keep him, by his own power, through faith, unto everlasting salvation, 1 Peter 1:5." The weaker the Christian feels himself, the more "will God perfect his own strength in his weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)." Nor shall "the hope that has been formed in him ever make him ashamed, [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5)." No, "he shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; and shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

Be then, brethren, Christians indeed.

Get just views of your duty, both towards God and man; And be like-minded with God in relation to it, desiring nothing but to be, and do, all that God himself requires; And know where all your help and hope is; not in yourselves, but in the Lord your God, who alone can "guide you by his counsel, so as ultimately to bring you to his glory! [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24)."

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. [Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21)."

#696

GOD'S WORD, THE MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION

**[Psalm 119:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.9)**

"How can a young man keep his way pure?  
 By living according to your Word!"

There is much despondency in the human mind, especially in reference to the great work of sanctification.

There are many who wish to become holy, but they know not how.

They would mortify sin, but they cannot.

They would serve God in newness of life, but to attempt it, appears to them a hopeless task.

The people of the world, if exhorted to give themselves up to God, do not hesitate to affirm that, in the existing state of things, it is impossible; and many who have begun to do this in their own strength, and found its insufficiency for so great a work, have given up in despair, and returned to their former state of carelessness and indifference. But, while we acknowledge the impossibility of serving God aright by any strength of our own, we must deny that it is altogether impractical to fulfill his will. On the contrary, if any man ask, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" we are prepared to answer, that it may be done, "By living according to your Word!"

We have here,

I. A difficulty proposed.

"How can a young man keep his way pure?"

If this question were asked in reference only to outward defilements, it would not be without its difficulties.

Consider to what temptations a young man is exposed. Those which arise from within, are exceeding great. And they are continually strengthened by those occurring from without. Everything he sees around him has a tendency to foster and to gratify some bad passion; while the examples on every side countenance and encourage the indulgence of it. To render evil the less formidable, everyone agrees to strip it of its proper names, and to affix to it some gentle appellation that shall conceal its odiousness, and cast a veil over its deformity. Nay, as if it were not sufficient to cloak its malignity, many become its panders and its advocates, and endeavor to laugh out of the world all that squeamishness that betrays a fear of evil, and an aversion to the commission of it.

Is it any wonder if young men, so circumstanced, fall into sin? Or is it easy for them to keep their garments clean in such an ensnaring and polluting world as this?

But if the question be asked in reference to the sanctity which God requires, the difficulty will appear great indeed.

It is not a Pharisaic righteousness—a cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter, that God requires; but real holiness, both of heart and life. We must seek to be "cleansed from secret faults," as well as from those which are more open; and never account our end fully accomplished, until we are as "pure as the Lord Jesus Christ is pure," and as "perfect as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

But how shall a young man so keep his way pure? How shall he "mortify the whole body of sin," keeping in subjection so many unruly appetites, correcting so many unhallowed dispositions, and putting forth into constant exercise so many heavenly graces as are comprehended in real piety? Indeed, we may ask, How shall young people of either gender so walk before God? In respect of outward decorum, females, from the restraints of education, have a great advantage; perhaps, in reference to vital godliness also: they may be considered as more favored than the other gender, because they have more opportunity for serious reflection.

But genuine piety is uncongenial with our fallen nature; and to attain it is no easy task to any, of either gender, or of whatever age or quality or condition. The very names by which the divine life is described in Scripture is sufficiently show that it is neither attained nor exercised without great difficulty. A "race," a "wrestling for the mastery," a "warring of a good warfare"—all require much exertion; and not for a moment only, but until the victory is accomplished.

It must be confessed, therefore, that a young man's course is very difficult; that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way," in which he has to walk; and that if ever he gains "the kingdom of Heaven, he must take it by violence."

Happy is it for us, however, that we have, on divine authority,

II. The difficulty solved.

To the question asked, "How can a young man keep his way pure?"

The answer is given, "By living according to your Word!"

1. The Holy Scriptures afford a sure directory.

There may surely be particular cases, even to our dying hour, in which it may be difficult to discover the precise line of duty. But, for the most part, the way of righteousness is clearly defined; and it is our own blindness alone that makes it appear intricate or doubtful. There is no corruption of the heart which is not there condemned, nor any holy affection which is not there delineated. There everything is described in its proper colors; piety is exalted as the perfection of our nature; and sin is declared to be "an abomination in the sight of God."

The example of our blessed Lord also is there portrayed with the utmost exactness; so that, whatever doubt might obscure a precept, the true light is reflected on it, and a perfect standard is exhibited before us. It cannot be through ignorance, therefore, that any shall err, if only they will make use of the light afforded them in God's blessed Word.

2. The Holy Scriptures afford sufficient encouragement.

There is not a *precept* in the whole inspired volume which is not made also the subject of a *promise*. God has engaged to "give us a new heart, and to renew within us a right spirit, and to cleanse us from our filthiness and from all our idols;" so that, however *inveterate any lust*may be, here is provision against it; and however *arduous any duty*may be, here is sufficient strength promised for the performance of it.

How effectual the Word is, when duly improved, may be seen in the general description given of it by the Psalmist, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

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! [Psalm 19:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7-11)."

Here, whether in respect of direction or efficacy, its sufficiency for our necessities is fully declared. But yet more satisfactory is the declaration of Peter, when he affirms, that by "the exceeding great and precious promises of Scripture, we may be made partakers of the divine nature, and be enabled to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust! [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)." By the word, therefore, we may cleanse our way; not externally only, but really, truly, spiritually, and to the full extent of our necessities; so that the difficulty in our text is completely solved; and to the inquiry there made, we are prepared to answer, "Having these promises, dearly Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God! [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

ADDRESS.

1. Study the Scriptures of Truth.

Do not form your standard by the opinions of men, or labor to cleanse your way by superstitious observances that have been devised by man; but look to the Word of God as the proper rule of your conduct, and seek for holiness in the way that is there prescribed. Be careless in your way, and your ruin will ensue! [Ecclesiastes 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.9); But let the word of Christ dwell in you richly "in all wisdom;" and you shall find it the power of God to the salvation of your souls!

2. Devote yourself to piety in early youth.

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," says Solomon. You must not stay until you are advanced in life before you "cleanse your way," but engage in that work while yet you are "young." In the appointment of the sacrifices which were offered under the Law, the lambs were to be but a year old; and in the first-fruits presented unto God for a meat-offering, special care was to be taken that "green ears" should be offered, "beaten out indeed of full ears," but still green, and needing to be "dried with fire" before they could be ground to flour, [Leviticus 2:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.14-16).

Does not this show what use is to be made of our early youth? Methinks, it speaks powerfully; and I pray God that this day the greenest ears among you may be consecrated to the Lord, and receive from him some blessed tokens of his favorable acceptance. Let the youngest, who are as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word; and they shall grow thereby, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2);" and let the "young men have the Word of God abiding in them; and they shall overcome the wicked one, [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.14)."

3. Live in the daily habit of self-examination.

Inward and unperceived impurity will come upon you, if you are not always on your guard. A mariner may be drawn from his course by currents, as well as driven by winds; and therefore from day to day, he consults his compass and his chart, to see whether there have been any deviation from his destined path. The same precautions must be used by you. You must not only "examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith," but what progress you are making in the faith. Do this, beloved, daily, and with all diligence; so shall you "be blameless und harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining among them as lights in the world, and holding forth in your walk and conversation the word of life! [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16);" and be assured, that in so ordering your conversation aright, "you shall at last behold the salvation of God."

#697

HOW TO ATTAIN DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

**[Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18)**

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!"

The necessity of Divine teaching, in order to a spiritual acquaintance with the truth of God, is by many denied; and all expectation of the Holy Spirit's influence for that end is derided as wild enthusiasm. But, however the profane ungodly world may scoff at the idea, it is "by the Spirit of God alone that we can know the things which are freely given to us by God, 1 Corinthians 2:12;" and the wisest of men, as much as the most ignorant, has reason to adopt the petition in our text, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!"

From these words we shall take occasion to show,

I. What wondrous things are contained in God's law.

If we understand the law here spoken of, as importing the Law of Moses, it certainly is full of wonders; the moral law, being a perfect transcript of the mind of God; and the ceremonial law, being a shadow of all those good things which are revealed to us in the Gospel.

But we apprehend that David is speaking rather of the Gospel, even of that "law which is come forth from Zion, and that word which has proceeded from Jerusalem." No one of the prophets, scarcely excepting even Isaiah himself, had clearer or richer views of Christ than David; and as he speaks of Christ in almost all his Psalms, we may justly suppose, that in this place he refers to the wonders that are contained in the Gospel of Christ.

Consider the Gospel **generally**.

In it is revealed salvation, salvation purchased by the blood and righteousness of God's only-begotten Son. What a mystery is this! The God of Heaven and earth assuming our nature, that in that nature he may expiate the guilt of a ruined world! We are accustomed to hear of this, and therefore listen to it without emotion; but what would we think of it, if it now reached our ears for the first time? Truly "great is this mystery of godliness!" We, through unbelief and indifference, think little of it; but "the angels," though infinitely less interested in it than we, "desire day and night to look into it," and to comprehend, if it were possible, the heights and depths of love that are contained in it! [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12).

Consider it more **particularly**.

Mark well the character of this salvation:  
its freeness,  
its fullness,  
its suitableness!

It is as free as the light we see, or the air we breathe! It has come to us unsolicited and unsought; and it is given to us "without money and without price, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)." The whole world are invited to come to Christ as to an overflowing fountain, and to "take of the water of life freely, [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.17)." So full is it, that it neither wants, nor is capable of, any addition. Nothing is left to be supplied by man; he gives nothing, but receives all. "All is treasured up for us in Christ! [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)," "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)." If only we are content to receive out of his fullness, we shall never lack anything that is necessary either for our present or eternal happiness [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). And this is exactly such a salvation as is suitable to fallen man. If we were required to add anything to what Christ has done and suffered for us, in order to render it sufficient for our salvation, what could we add? What have we of our own, but sin? The more anyone knows of himself, the more he would despair, if anything were required of him, as a price whereby to purchase a saving interest in Christ. Doubtless we must repent, and believe, and obey the Gospel, before we can be saved; but repentance, faith, and obedience, though necessary as means to an end, merit nothing at the hands of God; nor have we of ourselves any sufficiency for those things; even those graces are wrought in us by the Spirit of God, who "gives us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." Salvation, from first to last, is altogether of grace; and therefore it is equally suitable to all; to the thief when dying on the cross, as to Nicodemus, or Nathanael, whose whole life and conduct had been so exemplary, and who lived to adorn the doctrine they professed.

Contemplate these things, and say whether they contain not "wonders" that surpass the comprehension, both of men and angels?

From the text however we may learn,

II. How we are to attain the knowledge of them.

Doubtless we must "search the Scriptures," and that with all diligence, [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39). But, if we search them in dependence on our own wisdom, we shall never succeed. We must look up to God for the teachings of his Spirit, even as David did, and pray, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."

This is the way prescribed by God.

God regards all men as blind, [Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17), and incapable of comprehending spiritual things—until he himself has opened their eyes, and given them a spiritual discernment, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). [Ephesians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.18). Hence he counsels all to come to the Lord Jesus Christ "for eye-salve, that they may see, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18);" and to look to him as the only Author of true wisdom, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5). He represents it as the Holy Spirit's office to take of the things that are Christ's, and to show them unto us, [John 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8); [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11); [John 16:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13-14);" and to bring home to the minds of men a clear perception of those various truths which are most of all interesting to their souls. He considers all men as equally under the necessity of submitting to the teachings of his Spirit, [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45).

God derides the efforts of those who lean to their own understanding, 1 Corinthians 1:19-20, and will communicate to "babes the things which he conceals from the wise and prudent! [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)." True it is, that God uses both the written and preached word as the means of conveying instruction; but the due reception of that instruction he ascribes to the operation of his own almighty power, [1 Corinthians 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.5-7). Even the disciples whom Jesus himself had instructed for three or four years, were not able rightly to apprehend his Word, until "he opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45);" and, when Peter confessed his Lord to be the Christ, he was expressly told, that "flesh and blood had not revealed it" to him, but God himself! [Matthew 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.17).

Be it known then to all, that every man, whether learned or unlearned, must "hear and learn of the Father," who is "the Father of lights, and from whom comes every good and perfect gift, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)."

This is the way pursued by the saints in all ages.

Who more instructed than David? yet he was not ashamed to seek from God a spiritual illumination. The saints at Ephesus were inferior to no Church whatever, in a comprehension of divine truth; yet did Paul pray for them, that they might yet further "be enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, through whose gracious influences alone they could grow either in knowledge or in grace, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18).

If we look to those of later times, we find this truth acknowledged by all, excepting those infidels who "deny the Lord that bought them." The Reformers of our Church have most unequivocally sanctioned the use of these means, and encouraged us to look up to God for "the inspiration of his Spirit," "that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same." Let us not be contented with any efforts of our own, or any instructions from man; but let us "cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding, knowing that it is the Lord alone who gives wisdom, and that out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are studying the Holy Scriptures.

It is surprising what pains many take to acquire an academic knowledge of the Bible, while yet they remain contentedly ignorant of those deep things which none but God can teach. But let me entreat you to seek above all things to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, even that glory which He only who commanded light to shine out of darkness can make known unto you [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6).

2. To those who, though incapable of entering academically into the letter of the Scriptures, have yet, through grace, a knowledge of the spiritual truths contained in them.

Blessed be God, there are some among us, of whom, though unskilled in human knowledge, it may be said, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven." "They were once blind; but now they see;" "They were once darkness; but are now light in the Lord." Be thankful to him who has so highly favored and distinguished you! [1 Corinthians 1:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.27-28); and endeavor to walk worthy of him who has given unto you this invaluable blessing, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9). If you be "light in the Lord, then walk as children of the light" and of the day, [Ephesians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.8).

#698

DAVID'S DESIRE AFTER GOD'S WORD

**[Psalm 119:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.20)**

"My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times!"

In general, there is no other connection between the different verses of this Psalm, than the accidental one of their beginning with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet; yet possibly the collocation of them may occasionally have been determined by their bearing upon some particular point. The whole Psalm is an eulogy upon the Word of God, and a declaration of the love which David bore towards it.

And, while we apprehend that every distinct sentence was put down as it occurred to the Psalmist's mind, without any particular dependence on its context, we suppose that, in the arrangement of some parts, there may have been a design in placing some observations so as to confirm or enforce others which had preceded them. In the 18th verse, David had said, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your Law;" and in the two following verses, as they stand, he may be considered as enforcing that petition; first, by the consideration of the shortness of his continuance here; and, then, by the exceeding greatness of his wish to obtain the desired blessing, "I am a stranger in the earth; hide not your commandments from me. My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto your judgments at all times." Now, this expression being so exceeding strong, I will take occasion from it to point out:

I. David's intensity of desire after the Word of God.

Often does he say that he has "longed" for God's Word verse 40, 131, 174; but here he says, "My soul breaks for the longing that it has." To enter into the force of this expression, let us compare his desire after God's Word with the desire felt by others in cases of extreme emergency.

1. Let us compare it with the desire of a hunted deer.

Let us conceive of a deer that has for many hours been fleeing from its pursuers, until its strength is altogether exhausted, and it is ready to faint with fatigue. Let us suppose that its fears are raised to the uttermost, by the rapid advance of its enemies, ready to seize and tear it in pieces. How intense must be its thirst! How gladly would it pause a few moments at a water-brook, to revive its parched frame, and to renovate its strength for further flight! Of this we may form some conception; and it may serve in a measure to convey to us an idea of David's thirst after the judgments of his God.

"O God," says he, "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)."

"My soul longs, yes, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God! [Psalm 84:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.2)."

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" [Psalm 42:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-3)"?

2. Let us compare it with the desire of an endangered mariner.

Mariners for the most part are men of great courage; but when ready to be overwhelmed in the tempestuous ocean, they sink like other men. "For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end! [Psalm 107:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.25-27)." Such is the description given of them by God himself.

But let us take an instance upon record. When Paul was "sailing by Crete, there arose a tempestuous wind," and the ship becoming unmanageable, "they let her drive;" and "fearing they should fall into the quicksands, they struck sail, and so were driven." "Being exceedingly tossed with the tempest, they lightened the ship, casting out with their own hands the very tackling" which they had stowed up for the management of the ship. In this perilous condition they continued a whole two weeks, not having taken during all that time so much as one regular meal. Paul, in the immediate prospect of having the ship dashed to pieces, and no hope remaining to any of them of safety unless on broken pieces of the ship, said to them, "This is the fourteenth day that you have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing; I beg you to take some food; for this is for your health;" he administered to them some bread, and then "cast into the sea the very wheat" with which the ship was provisioned; and soon "the ship ran aground, and was broken in pieces by the violence of the waves! [Acts 27:14-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.14-41)."

How must all this crew have longed for safety! How must their "soul have broken for the longing which they had" to escape from their peril! Yet not even this exceeded the desire which David had for the Word of God.

3. Let us compare it with the desire of a deserted soul.

This will come nearer to the point. The feelings of a hunted deer or an endangered mariner are merely natural; but those of a deserted soul are spiritual, and therefore more suited to illustrate those which David speaks of in our text.

See the state of a deserted soul in Job, "If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas—no wonder my words have been impetuous. The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me! [Job 6:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.2-4)."

Or take the case recorded in the 88th Psalm, "You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you! [Psalm 88:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.6-7); [Psalm 88:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.9); [Psalm 88:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14-16)."

Here we see what is meant by the soul breaking for the longing that it has after God. And there is in this Psalm another verse, which, to one who has ever felt what it is to have an overwhelming desire after God, will convey the true import of my text, "I opened my mouth and panted; for I longed for your commandments! verse 131. The sigh of one overwhelmed with a desire after God, expresses the very thing."

Nor was this a sudden emotion on some extraordinary occasion; no; it was the constant habit of David's mind; it was what he felt "at all times!" "My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto your judgments at all times."

I am aware that this may appear extravagant. But we must remember that this expression was not a poetic fiction, but an argument solemnly addressed to the heart-searching God. And that it was not stronger than the occasion called for, will appear while I show you,

II. The reason of David's so longing for God's blessed Word.

The reasons that might be assigned are numberless. But I will confine myself to three:

1. David so longed for God's Word, because in it he found God himself.

In the works of creation, something of God may be discerned; but it is in his Word alone that all his perfections are displayed, and all his eternal counsels are made known. In this respect, "God has magnified his Word above all his name," and all the means whereby he has made himself known to men, [Psalm 138:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.2).

There he met Jehovah, as Adam met him, amidst the trees of the garden in Paradise. There "he walked with God, and conversed with him as a friend." There he had such "fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ," and such "communion with the Holy Spirit," as he could never find in any other field, nor ever attain but by meditation on the Word of God.

Can we, then, wonder that he so longed for that word, and that his very soul broke for the longing that he had for it? The wonder rather is, that there should be a person upon earth who could have access to that sacred volume, and not so value it.

2. David so longed for God's Word, because from it he obtained all that his necessities required.

Did he desire the forgiveness of all his sins? There he found "a fountain opened for sin and for impurity," a fountain capable of washing him from all the guilt he had contracted in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah! In reference to those very transactions, and to the efficacy of the sin-atoning blood of Christ, he cries, "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)."

Did he need:  
direction in difficulty,  
support in trouble, and  
strength for an unreserved obedience?

There he found it all, and from thence derived it in the very hour of need, to the full extent of his necessities. Such were the refreshments which David found in the Word, that corn and wine and oil, and all the delicacies of the universe, could but faintly shadow forth; and thence he derived such treasures as were absolutely unsearchable.

Can we wonder, then, that the Word of God was, in David's estimation, sweeter than honey and the honey-comb, and infinitely more precious than the finest gold! [Psalm 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.10).

3. David so longed for God's Word, because by it he gained a foretaste of Heaven itself.

The word was to him as Jacob's ladder, by which he held fellowship with Heaven itself. By it he ascended to Mount Pisgah, and surveyed the Promised Land in all its length and breadth. In it he beheld his Savior, as it were, transfigured before his eyes, yes, and seated on his throne of glory, surrounded by myriads of saints and angels; yes, and beheld the very throne reserved for himself, and the crown of glory prepared for him, and the golden harp already tuned for him to bear his part among the heavenly choir.

I forbear to speak more on this subject; because, if what I have already spoken does not justify the language of my text, then nothing that I can add can be of any weight. Only let any person read this Psalm, in which no less than one hundred and seventy-six times the excellency of the sacred volume is set forth in every variety of expression that David could invent; and he will see, that the language of my text was no other than what every man should both feel and utter.

But from all this, who does not see:

1. That religion is not a mere form, but a reality!

Religion, if it is genuine, occupies, not the head, but the heart and soul, every faculty of which it controls and regulates. O that we all felt it so! But indeed, brethren, so it is; and so it must be, if ever we would enjoy the benefits it is intended to convey.

2. That we all have very abundant occasion for shame in a review both of our past and present state!

We are not, like the unhappy papists, debarred from God's blessed Word. The very least and lowest among us has free access to it, and may read it for himself; yes, and derive still greater advantage from it than ever David himself reaped; by reason of the rich additions which have been made to it since his day, and the fuller discovery it gives us of God's mind and will.

Yet how many of us read it not at all, or only in a formal cursory manner, without any such feeling as that which is expressed in my text! My dear brethren, we suffer loss, exceeding great loss—by our negligence in this respect. Did we but read the Word, and meditate on it day and night, and pray over it, and converse with God by it—what blessings might we not obtain and not enjoy?

Well, I leave it, with "commending you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified! [Acts 20:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.32)." I am certain that "it is profitable for all that your souls can desire;" and that if you improve it aright, it shall render you perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, [2 Timothy 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.17)," and shall "make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus, [2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15)."

#699

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

**[Psalm 119:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.30-32)**

"I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws.  
 I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame.  
 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free!"

Everything which has an aspect of *egotism* is for the most part to be avoided; or, at all events, it should be entered upon with extreme care, and be relinquished as soon as the occasion for it has ceased. Yet, while this rule is proper for private Christians, we have reason to be thankful that the Inspired Writers were under no necessity of submitting to it; but that, on the contrary, they were constrained by the powerful motions of the Holy Spirit, to record the secret workings of their hearts, and to develop the principles by which they were actuated in the divine life.

What a treasure has in this view been committed to us in the Psalms of David! In him we see what is the experience of God's saints in every age. In the very words which we have just read we may behold a Christian's mind:

I. The Christian's **retrospective testimony**.

We may take the words as declaring,

1. The Christian's deliberate choice.

Whatever was his state in former life, he has now become a new creature; his former sins and errors he has utterly renounced; and has determinately embraced the truth of God, even that truth which God has revealed in the Gospel of his Son. He knows that, as a sinner, he is justly liable to God's heavy displeasure; and that there is no hope for him, but in that Savior who died for him upon the cross. Hence, with the fullest conviction of his mind and the most deliberate purpose of his soul, has he "fled for refuge to Christ, and laid hold on him as his only hope!"

2. The means by which the Christian seeks to effect his end.

The written Word of God is regarded by him as the only ground of his beliefs, and the only rule of his practice. The promises contained in it he treasures up in his mind, for the encouragement of his soul; and the precepts, as a sure directory. The Sacred Volume is to him what the chart and compass are to the mariner; nor will he ever pass a day without consulting it, to ascertain the state of his soul, and the course that he shall pursue.

3. The exertions made by the Christian in the prosecution of his purpose.

No sooner did he turn to God in earnest, than he found allurements, on the one hand, to draw him from the Lord; and threats, on the other hand, to drive him from his God. But his conscience bears him witness, that "he has stuck unto God's testimonies," and "cleaved unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." True, the conflict yet continues, yes, and requires the utmost exertions of his soul; but still he is "steadfast and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord; assured that, at last, his labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Conformable with his past experience is also,

II. The Christian's **prospective determination**.

He feels, indeed, that God alone can uphold him.

This is strongly expressed in that prayer, "O Lord, do not let me be put to shame!" In vain would be all his own efforts, if he were not aided from on high. Soon would he fall, and make shipwreck of his faith, and "be put utterly to shame," if God should withdraw from him for one single moment! He feels himself like an infant in its mother's arms, and cries to God continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe." He laments that in his own heart he is narrow and contracted, and incapable of either devising or executing such plans as may advance his spiritual welfare in the way that he could wish. He seems to himself like a ship that is becalmed; and which, for lack of winds to carry him forward, is in danger of being diverted from his path by currents which he is unable to withstand. Hence he prays to God for such communications of his Holy Spirit as shall fill his sails, and bear him onward to his destined port.

In dependence on God, he determines to redouble his exertions until he has attained the great object of his desires.

He is not contented to "walk" in the ways of God. No! he would "run;" he would "run, and not be weary; he would march onward, and not faint." He considers himself as engaged in a race; and he sees his course clearly marked in the commandments of his God. Hence he determines, that "when God shall enlarge his heart, he will run with all his might, and never stop until the prize shall be accorded to him. Whatever advance he may have made, "he forgets what is behind, and reaches forward to that which is ahead, and presses on for the prize of his high calling" with increased zeal. He determines that nothing shall abate his ardor, or for a moment divert him from his path. Thus he runs the race that is set before him; and determines, through grace, "so to run it, that he may obtain the prize."

Let me now add a few words,

1. Of **commendation**, to those who can adopt this language.

I do hope that some among you are like-minded with David in these particulars; and that, if you have not attained his eminence in the divine life, you are yet truly and habitually following his steps. Shall I not, then, say to you, as Moses did to Israel of old, "Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord! [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)."

Truly, in comparison with you, the greatest, wisest, noblest of mankind are in a poor and base condition. In you, the end of your creation has been answered; yes, and the end of your redemption too. In you God delights; yes, he regards you as his peculiar treasure! On you the very angels before the throne account it an honor to wait, as your ministering servants; and for you are prepared crowns and kingdoms that shall never fade away!

Was Mary commended by our Lord for having chosen the best part? And was she assured that it should never be taken away from her? The same commendation is yours, and the same assurance is yours also. I do, then, from my soul commend you, however pitiable in other respects your condition may be; and, in the name of my Divine Master, I say for your encouragement, "Do not be weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you fault not."

2. Of **reproof**, to those who are yet strangers to this heavenly experience.

What have you been doing all your days, that you have never yet made this choice? Are the ways of the world equal in any respect to the way of truth? Are they as reasonable in themselves? Are they as conducive to the best interests of man? Or will they prove so happy in their outcome?

Compare the things which tempt you from the testimonies of the Lord, with the loss which they will occasion, and the evils which they will entail upon you. You may now, perhaps, justify the preference which you give to sin; but say whether you will not one day be ashamed of it? Say whether, in that hour when you shall be bidden to depart from your Savior's presence, and to take your portion forever in a lake of fire—you will not be ashamed of the choice which you have now so unwisely made, and of the hopes which you now so presumptuously cherish?

Perhaps you now laugh at the idea of an enlargement of heart, and deride the course to which it leads; but will you do so in that day? Will you not rather lament that you followed the course of this world, instead of prosecuting the ways which lead to Heaven? I would say then to you, "Seek now the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near." There is no repentance in the grave, nor any reversing of the sentence that shall soon be passed upon you. Begin, then, the course which David ran, and prosecute it with the ardor that filled his soul. So shall you possess with him, the joy that is set before you, and inherit to all eternity the rest that remains for the people of God!

#700

WISDOM OF TRUE PIETY

**[Psalm 119:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.34)**

"Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; yes, I shall observe it with my whole heart!"

A spiritual knowledge essentially differs from the mere exercise of our intellectual powers. A man may have the richest stores of human knowledge, and the most discriminating faculty in various branches of science—and yet be under the dominion, the allowed dominion, of his own lusts and passions.

But spiritual knowledge is always accompanied with gracious dispositions; and for the sake of its practical effects alone is it to be desired. This appears from what Paul says respecting the intercessions which he continually offered before God in the behalf of his Colossian converts, "We do not cease," says he, "to pray for you, and to desire that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, [Colossians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.9-10)."

In a foregoing part of this Psalm it might seem, as if knowledge alone had been the end for which David desired a spiritual illumination, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!" But we see in our text, that he had far other ends in view; he longed for knowledge, only that he might have his soul the more enlarged by it to run the way of God's commandments, "Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; yes, I shall observe it with my whole heart."

From these words we will take occasion to show,

I. How true wisdom will operate.

The provisional engagement which David entered into was no other than what must necessarily result from an answer to his petition. If God gives to any of us a spiritual understanding, we shall immediately begin:

1. To keep his law.

Whatever God has revealed in his Word will be a law unto us.

Has he bidden us to repent? We shall humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes.

Has he enjoined us to believe in his dear Son? We shall receive him into our hearts, and embrace him as all our salvation and all our desire.

Has he commanded us to obey his precepts? We shall endeavor to search out his will, and to conform ourselves to it in all things.

Whatever temptations may assault us, we shall not allow them to turn us aside from the path of duty.

Whatever opposition we may have to encounter, we shall hold on our way, determined to keep God's law; yes, to "keep it to the end! verse 112." This alone is true wisdom, [Job 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.28). Yes, this is the first beginning of wisdom in the soul, [Psalm 111:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.10).

2. To observe his law with our whole hearts.

There are two things which a spiritual understanding will most assuredly teach us, namely:  
the beauty and excellency of God's law,  
the folly of rendering to it a merely partial obedience.

To an unenlightened mind many of God's commands appear absurd; and men are ready to say of them, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" But, in the view of one who is taught of God, "there is no commandment grievous;" the scope of everything which God has spoken, is to produce the present and eternal happiness of his creatures. The language of every injunction is, Be holy, be happy. To attempt to lower any command to the standard of man's opinion, or of our own wishes, is seen to be the most horrible foolishness; for, if we can deceive man, we cannot deceive God, "to him all things are naked and open." As God knows the extent of his own commands, so he knows the precise measure of obedience which we pay to them, "He weighs," not our actions only, but "our spirits" also.

Hence a partial obedience is the same kind of folly as if a man should request permission to take a poisoned cup, because it was sweet; or as if he should shut his eyes, and say, that no man can see him. Convinced of this, he begs of God to "put truth in his inward parts," and desires to be "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit."

As from a root which is acknowledged to be good, we may anticipate a corresponding fruit; so from fruit that is excellent, we may infer with certainty the goodness of the root. In proof of this we will proceed to show:

II. Wherein its operation will approve itself to every reflecting mind.

The observing of God's law with our whole hearts necessarily evinces the existence of true wisdom in the soul; because,

1. Obedience to God's law is consonant with right reason.

What is disobedience, but a preferring of:  
the creature to God,  
the body to the soul,  
and time to eternity?

And will anyone say that this is reasonable, or that it has even a shadow of reason in it? Reason requires the very reverse of this; and the yielding up of our soul and body to God, as a living sacrifice, is expressly called "a reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." If we consider ourselves only as the work of God's hands, this kind of service is reasonable. But, if we consider ourselves as redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, it is infinitely more reasonable; for, "having been bought with a price, we are not our own, but are bound to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are God's."

2. Obedience to God's law is conducive to our best interests.

We will concede, for argument sake, all that the slaves of pleasure can say in its behalf; yes, we will concede ten times more than its most infatuated votary ever ventured to assert. Having done this, we will ask, What good will it all do you in a dying hour, and at the bar of judgment? "Godliness," we are told, "is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." But of ungodliness no such thing can be asserted. Granting, that the ungodliness may be of the least offensive kind; yes, that it shall be so subtle, as to assume the appearance, and to gain from many the applause of piety; still we ask: What will it avail in the day that God shall judge the world?

But it is not true, that the pleasures of sin are so great or so satisfactory. On the contrary, there is no comparison between the peace that flows from piety, and the gratifications that result from any criminal indulgence. "The work of righteousness is peace;" but "the way of transgressors is hard." And, as to the eternal world, there can be no doubt. Inasmuch then as piety is most consonant with right reason, and most conducive to our best interests, it approves itself, beyond a possibility of doubt, the genuine offspring of true wisdom.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who live in the allowed violation of any one commandment.

The world may count you wise; yes, "if you are doing well unto yourselves, (that is, are advancing your own temporal interests,) all men will speak well of you, [Psalm 49:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.18)." But what does God say of you? "They have forsaken the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them? [Jeremiah 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.9)." Ah! what indeed? To the rich man, whose heart was elated with his temporal prospects, God said, "You fool!" and no better character will he assign to you. Think only with what an eye the heart-searching God beholds you; or what the angels think of your conduct; or what you yourselves will think of it in a little time; and you will be at no loss to form a right estimate of it. If you would be truly wise in God's estimation, your obedience to him must be uniform and unreserved, [Matthew 7:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.24-27). [Deuteronomy 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.6).

2. Those who profess to be endued with true wisdom.

If "God has given us understanding," then we must evidence it by the purity of our hearts and lives. But many there are, who can talk very fluently about religion, who yet are very far from being wise in the sight of God. Hear the judgment of God himself on this subject, "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conduct his works with meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts (and these are no uncommon inhabitants with the professors of religion), lie not against the truth." (Let proud, conceited, and contentious professors hear this. They are "liars against the truth.") This wisdom descends not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish. "But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy, [James 3:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.13-17)." Here is the test of true wisdom; here is the evidence of a sound understanding. The man that is destitute of these gracious tempers, is in darkness even until now; but the man who from love to Christ is enabled to live in the habitual exercise of them, has surely an understanding heart, and is made wise unto salvation.

#701

THE VANITIES OF THIS WORLD, AN OBSTACLE TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

**[Psalm 119:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.37)**

"Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken me in your way!"

The depths of the human heart are never more plainly disclosed, than when a man comes into the presence of his Maker. Then he opens all his needs, and supplicates relief for all his necessities.

The godly man at a throne of grace knows no deceit, no concealment, no false humility. What he speaks, (if he is in a right state) he feels. Let us then draw near, and listen to the breathings of holy David. He felt the ensnaring influence of worldly things, and the lamentable tendency of fallen man to relax his efforts in the service of his God; hence he poured out his soul in this humble supplication, "Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken me in your way!"

That we may all be stirred up to implore similar blessings at the hands of God, we propose to show,

I. The ensnaring power and danger of earthly vanities.

By the word "vanity," we understand all those things which are apt to engross the affections of men. The Apostle classes them all under "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life;" and they all justly deserve the name assigned them in the text, because they are sure to disappoint the desires and expectations of all who look to them for any solid or permanent satisfaction.

These things altogether captivate and enslave the minds of the generality of men.

The natural man seeks nothing above them. His mind is not occupied with anything above them. He "is in the flesh;" he "walks according to the flesh," "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." His "affections are altogether set upon things below, and not on things above." His thoughts, his conversation, his labors from day to day, all arise from, and terminate in, the things of time and sense; and from these things alone spring all his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows.

These things also have great power over those who profess godliness.

So our Lord has told us in the parable of the Sower. The thorny-ground hearers have made, in appearance at least, a great proficiency in religion. They have far surpassed the stony-ground hearers, who yet have heard the word with joy, and given many cheering and hopeful promises of a future harvest. They have been long established, and brought forth much which both they and others have deemed estimable fruit; but yet, "through the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, the seed that has grown up in them is choked, and they bring forth no fruit to maturity."

Even people truly and deeply pious are in great danger from worldly vanities; else why did our blessed Lord caution even his own immediate disciples in those memorable words, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares! [Luke 21:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.34)." There is yet an earthly and sensual spirit dwelling in the best of us, and working powerfully to counteract the better dictates of our new man, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17); and he knows little of his own heart, who does not see and bewail his own proneness to look back again after the flesh-pots of Egypt.

But while we point out thus the danger of earthly vanities, we would point out also,

II. The way to escape their deadly influence.

We should set a guard upon all our senses.

The senses are inlets to all manner of evil! Alas! alas! how often has the mind been contaminated by what it has either seen or heard! If it were no more than what we have read in books, or heard in conversation, that was calculated to encourage a worldly spirit, we should all feel abundant reason to lament, that we have not been sufficiently on our guard against the admission of bad impressions on the mind. But the vilest lusts have found an entrance into the heart by these avenues. Some have found to their cost, that one sinful idea, which they have either seen in a book or picture, or heard in conversation, has abode with them through life, when they have greatly desired to forget it; while hundreds of sermons which they would have been glad to have remembered, have passed from their minds like the morning cloud.

Behold David, the man after God's own heart; what reason had he to curse the day that he ever looked upon Bathsheba! What reason too had Solomon's fool to lament that ever he listened to the voice of the enchanting adulteress! [Proverbs 7:6-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 7.6-23). It is not without reason that Solomon advises us not to look upon the wine when sparkling in the glass, [Proverbs 23:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.31-32).

We must resist the very first entrance of sin into the soul; for it will operate like fire on a house of wood. Alas! "how great a matter does a little fire kindle! [James 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.5)." Its progress is very rapid; and who shall stop the conflagration, when once it has begun? "When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death! [James 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.15)."

We exhort all then, like Solomon, to make a covenant with their eyes, and with their ears also, yes, and with the very imaginations of their heart—that neither their physical nor intellectual eyes become an entrance to sin, or traitors to their souls.

We should cry earnestly to God for his effectual grace.

God does and will preserve his people from evil, if they cry unto him. We should therefore call upon him both for his preventing and his quickening grace; we should pray, as David, "Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken me in your way!"

There are many ways in which God will turn away our eyes "from beholding vanity." He will, if we are really seeking it at his hands, keep temptation from us. And how much we are all indebted to him for this, we shall never know, until we come to the bar of judgment, and have all his mercies unfolded to our view. Thousands of our fellow-creatures, who were once as respectable in every point of view as ourselves, have in an hour of temptation so fallen, as to destroy all their own honor and happiness through life. And why have not we done the same? Are we sure that we, if subjected to the same temptations as they, would not have done the same? Oh! if we are wise, we shall cry day and night, "Lead us not into temptation!"

But there are many other ways in which God can, and does, impart the same blessing. Perhaps he lays some affliction upon our bodies, and visits us with some personal or domestic calamity. We are apt on such occasions to complain of the affliction; whereas, if we saw from what evils the visitation was sent to deliver us, we should be adoring God for it as the richest of all mercies. Let our distress be either in body or mind, who will not bless God for it, if it is the means of weakening the influence of worldly objects on his soul, and of keeping his eyes from beholding vanity?

But, in addition to this, we should cry to him also for his quickening grace. However active we may be in the pursuit of earthly things, we all are too sluggish in our heavenly course. Nine times in this Psalm does David cry, "Quicken me!" and ninety-nine times do we need to renew the petition every day of our lives. Beg of God then to show you more and more clearly the excellency of "his way" (even of that salvation which Christ has wrought out for us.), and the blessedness of the end to which it leads.

This will quicken us more than anything else. Let us see the excellency of a life of faith; and that will make us despise the things of sense. Let us also get Pisgah views of the land of Canaan; and we shall value nothing that can be offered us in this dreary wilderness. Look at Christ as the way, and Christ as the end; and you will soon "cast away the besetting sins that impede you," and "run with alacrity the race that is set before you! [Hebrews 12:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1-2)."

ADDRESS.

1. Young people.

Greatly do you need to offer the petition in our text.

O! bear in mind the true character of earthly things; they are altogether vanity!

Bear in mind your danger from them; they will ensnare you. And, if the snare is not broken, they will destroy your souls!

Bear in mind your need of divine grace to counteract their influence. It is God alone who can preserve you; and, if not preserved by him, you will fall and perish!

2. Those who make a profession of godliness.

Do not think that you are above temptation! Satan tempted even our blessed Lord himself, by "showing him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." And he will tempt you in like manner.

Nor imagine that you may not fall; for Demas was as eminent as any of you, and yet fell at last, through love of this present world! [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10) with [Colossians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.14) and Philippians 24.

In every Church the sad effect of worldly and carnal lusts is seen. You yourselves see it in others. O, beware lest it is seen in you also. It is your duty and your happiness, to "be crucified unto the world, and to have the world crucified unto you! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)." You may use this world, if God has given it to you; but you must "so use it, as not to abuse it! [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)." Flee from all occasions of evil, that you may be "found of God at last without spot, and blameless! [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14)."

#702

TRUE LIBERTY

**[Psalm 119:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.45)**

"I will walk at liberty; for I seek your precepts."

Justly as civil liberty is appreciated among us, there are but few who have just conceptions of that liberty which has respect to morality and religion. Everyone knows that unrestrained liberty is licentiousness; but everyone does not know, that a sincere obedience to God's Holy Word is the most perfect liberty that man can enjoy. This, however, is plainly intimated in the passage before us; from whence I shall take occasion to show,

I. That the ungodly are strangers to true liberty.

They will boast of liberty, and "promise it to all who will conform to their ways; but they are altogether in a state of bondage! [2 Peter 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.19)."

1. The wicked are in bondage to the **world**.

The tastes of men differ, according to their age and to the sphere in which they move; but all of every age and every rank are subject to the laws of custom, which they dare not to infringe. Even the religion of men must be conformed to this standard; and God's commandments must be reduced to the scale which men have established for the regulation of their own lives.

If one is told what God requires, he immediately bethinks himself, 'What will this person say, or that person do, if I comply with requisitions so foreign to the habits of those around me? Will they not deride my singularity, and set themselves to oppose my insufferable preciseness?'

To justify their conduct, men put the Scriptures altogether aside, as an antiquated volume, the dictates of which are superseded by the wiser and more practical maxims of fashion and "philosophy, falsely so called." Yes, of all unconverted men it is declared, that they "walk according to the course of this world, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)," and "they are astonished when you do not rush with them into the same flood of wickedness, and they vilify you, [1 Peter 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.4)."

2. The wicked are in bondage to the **flesh**.

There are different degrees in which men yield to the impulse of their corrupt appetites; but every man has "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which is in his members, [Romans 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23)." In fact, there is not anyone so ignorant, but that even his unenlightened reason prescribes to him a better path than he pursues. Let us look around, and see what the dispositions and habits are of all around us. Are not all "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3)," without affecting anything higher than the gratification of their own corrupt appetites? We are told, that "they who are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5);" and we know, from infallible authority, that to whoever we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are to whom we obey! [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16)."

In truth, even to our dying hour will our conflicts with this tyrannical master continue; for even Paul himself complained, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death! [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24)."

3. The wicked are in bondage to the **Devil**.

Well is Satan called "the god of this world; for he works in all the children of disobedience, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)." Ever since he prevailed over our first parents in Paradise, he has subjected the whole race of man to his dominion, "taking them in his snares, and leading them captive at his will! [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)." That men deny the agency, and even the existence of this great adversary, is only a proof to what an extent they are "blinded by him, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4)," and how effectually he has lulled them to sleep in his very arms! [Luke 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21).

Doubtless it is very humiliating to think of ourselves as Satan's slaves; but this is the true state of every unconverted man; and even the saints themselves are not delivered from his influence, but through the mighty power of Jehovah himself, given in answer to fervent and believing prayer, [Ephesians 6:12-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12-18). [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7). [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20).

But the Psalmist's mention of liberty leads us more particularly to show,

II. What sweet enjoyments of liberty those who love and serve their God have.

David accounted the service of his God to be perfect freedom. And so, indeed, it is; for the man whom "the truth of the Gospel has made free, [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32)," and who "looks to God's precepts" as his only rule of conduct.

1. He walks according to the dictates of his own **judgment**.

He has an insight into the mind and will of God, and clearly discerns that there is not, in all the Holy Scriptures, a command which does not conduce to the happiness of all who obey it. His own mind and conscience go along with the Word of God, and set their seal to the truth and excellency of everything contained in it. "Not one commandment appears to him to be grievous, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3);" the whole law of God is esteemed by him as "holy, and just, and good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12) and [Psalm 119:128](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.128)." To "love God with all his heart and soul and strength, and his neighbor as himself," does not appear to him any hardship imposed upon him, but the perfection of his nature and completion of his felicity; so that he would on no account have one atom of this law cancelled, or mitigated in the least degree. His own judgment tells him that it is no less his privilege, than it is his duty, to be as "holy, as God is holy;" and as "perfect, as his Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

2. He walks according to the inclination of his own **will**.

He is neither drawn nor driven against his own will. He is, indeed, "made willing in the day of God's power, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3);" but "he is drawn with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love, [Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.4)." He does not, indeed, all that he would do; yes, in too many respects he does what he would not do, [Romans 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.15);" but this very thing shows that it is rather strength than inclination that he lacks, [Romans 7:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.16-20). Could the Christian have but the desire of his heart, he would leave no sin unmortified, no duty unfulfilled! He is in the situation of one who is running a race, or "fighting a fight;" had he but his will accomplished, his every antagonist would be vanquished in a moment, and "death itself, his last enemy, be swallowed up in victory."

3. He walks in an unbiased exercise of his own **affections**.

He has a real delight in God. He does not observe the duties of prayer and praise out of the fear of Hell, but from a real pleasure which he feels in drawing near to God, whom it is his privilege to call by the endearing name of Father, and in communion with whom he would gladly walk all the day long.

Conceive of Adam before his fall; and there you have an image of those who, through the tender mercy of God, are restored. True, they still have "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit lusting against the flesh; so that they neither do, nor can do, all that they would do, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17);" but their taste is the very same with that of angels; and the felicity of angels is begun in them; for their life, so far as they have really attained, is both a preparation for Heaven, and a foretaste also of Heaven, in their souls.

Let me then, in conclusion, commend this liberty to your acceptance.

Think not, my brethren, that the Gospel is a mere system of restraints; no, it is a "perfect law of liberty! [James 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.25);" and "all who are made free by Christ, have become free indeed, [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36)." O that religion were but understood in this view! No captive would more delight to shake off his chains, than sinners would to emancipate themselves from the sore bondage in which they are held! Know then, brethren, that I am authorised, in the name of Jesus Christ, to "preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bruised, [Luke 4:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18-19)." The jubilee trumpet now sounds in your ears, and proclaims to you a restoration to all that you have ever lost and forfeited.

Did not the poor slave, do you think, when called to resume his liberty and his inheritance, account the trumpet a joyful sound? Let the Gospel, then, be such a sound to you; and, instead of regarding God's service as a hard bondage, adopt the language of the Psalmist, "I will walk at liberty; for I seek your precepts!" "Take upon you the yoke of Christ, and I pledge myself that you shall find it light and easy; and you shall obtain everlasting rest unto your souls, [Matthew 11:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28-29)."

#703

COMFORT UNDER PERSECUTION

**[Psalm 119:51-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.51-52)**

"The arrogant mock me without restraint, but I do not turn from your law. I remember your ancient laws, O LORD, and I find comfort in them."

There is not, throughout the whole Scriptures, any woe so little feared, so little thought of, so little credited, as that which was denounced by our blessed Lord, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! [Luke 6:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.26)." But, in truth, there is no denunciation more certain to be executed than that; for there is nothing that can more infallibly prove us to be the enemies of God, than the approbation and love of the ungodly world! If it is asked, Why is this? I answer, that "the things which are highly esteemed among men are an abomination in the sight of God; and that the things which are pleasing to God are no less an abomination in the sight of men; and consequently, that, whichever of the two we serve, we must of necessity lose the favor of the other. This is what our blessed Lord has told us, "You cannot serve God and mammon;" you cannot adhere to either without despising and renouncing the other! [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24). And the truth of this has been exemplified in all the saints, from the time of Abel to the present moment. What David speaks respecting his own experience of it, will lead me to consider,

I. The **trials** which David endured.

He was held greatly in derision by his ungodly subjects.

If anyone could have escaped contempt, we would have supposed that David would be the happy man. His rank in society, as the king of Israel; his extraordinary prowess in war; the services he had rendered to his country; and the marvelous sublimity of his piety, must, we should have thought, have rendered him an object of universal love and admiration. But among his proud and envious subjects, this last quality neutralized, as it were, all his merits, and reduced him to an object of hatred and contempt. The highest people in his kingdom delighted to speak against him, verse 23; while the lowest readily joined in their opprobrious treatment of him, [Psalm 69:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.12). The fat bulls of Bashan on the one hand, and the dogs on the other, compassed him about, [Psalm 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.12); [Psalm 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.16), and treated him with every species of indignity. Even his own wife, who should have been ready to stem the torrent of abuse that was cast upon him, herself joined in it with peculiar malignity, [2 Samuel 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.20); and the very best actions of his life were made the chief subjects of their profane raillery, [2 Samuel 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.16) and [Psalm 69:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.10-12).

And let not this be thought a light affliction. Truly it is painful to flesh and blood to bear such contemptuous treatment; so, at least, the Apostle represents it in the Epistle to the Hebrews, [Hebrews 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.32-33); and so David himself found it to be, "Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us!" says he, "for we are exceedingly filled with contempt; our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud! [Psalm 123:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 123.3-4)."

And can we hope to escape a similar trial? Look at the saints from the beginning, and find one that ever escaped it?

How contemptuously did the scoffers of the antediluvian world ridicule the conduct of Noah, all the time that he was preparing the ark! [2 Peter 3:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.3-6).

What an object of derision, too, was Isaac, on account of his confidence in God, [Genesis 21:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 21.6) with [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29).

Behold Lot also in Sodom, [2 Peter 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.7-8).

And Elisha, 2 Kings 2:23.

And Jeremiah, [Jeremiah 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 20.7).

Or rather, look at our blessed Lord himself, and all his holy Apostles; what was there too contemptuous for the ungodly to say either of him, [Matthew 27:39-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.39-44), or them, [1 Corinthians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.13).

How, then, can anyone hope to escape in the present day? Is "the carnal mind less at enmity with God" now, than in former ages? That the laws of the land protect the godly to a certain degree, is true; but from the shafts of calumny and contempt—no laws, whether divine or human, can protect us; and this species of persecution, at least, shall every one experience, who will come out from the world, and boldly declare himself to be on the side of Christ, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19). "If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household! [Matthew 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.25)." "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution! [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)."

For our direction, then, let us contemplate,

II. The **graces** which David exercised.

While he bore his trials with patience, he allowed none of them to divert him from the path of duty.

David's mind was too firmly fixed on God to be moved by the scoffs and raillery of a profane world. What he did, he did from principle. He regarded God's Law as a rule from which no trial whatever should induce him to depart. Not only would he not turn back from the path of duty; he would not turn aside from it, no, not for a moment! The more contemptuously he was treated by men, the more diligently he sought communion with his God, in the study of his blessed Word, verse 23, 24, and in the exercise of fervent prayer, [Psalm 69:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.13).

Hence, when he and his people were treated with the utmost possible scorn and derision, he could appeal to God in the following triumphant language, "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten you, neither have we dealt falsely in your covenant; our heart is not turned back; neither have our steps declined from your ways! [Psalm 44:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 44.13-18) with 69:20."

And such, also, is the firmness which **we** should manifest.

It should be with us "a small matter to be judged by man's judgment, 1 Corinthians 4:3." We should have but one object, and that is, to approve ourselves to God; and, having "the testimony of our consciences that we have pleased him," we should not lay to heart the displeasure of others, however contemptuously or virulently it may be displayed. Onward we should go in our destined path, not turning either to the right hand or to the left. If the whole world should deride us, we should not be induced either to do anything which will offend our God, or to forbear anything which will honor him. That they "hate our light," and are offended at it, is no reason at all why we should "put it under a basket;" whoever they may be, whether friends or foes, our reply to them should be, "I will yet be more vile than thus! [2 Samuel 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.22)."

Nor will this be very difficult, when once we have tasted of,

III. The **consolations** which David enjoyed.

In the recollection of "God's laws of old, he comforted himself".

The term "laws" has in the Scriptures a great variety of meanings. In the Psalm before us it seems to import the declarations and decisions of Jehovah. Now God, in his Word, has abundantly declared that such treatment is to be expected, and that it is, to those who suffer it, a token for good, "I have become a laughing-stock to my friends, though I called upon God and he answered—a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless! Men at ease have contempt for misfortune as the fate of those whose feet are slipping, [Job 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 12.4-5)."

A lamp burning bright in a dark place is an object of high regard; but when it is so burnt down that the flame is quivering on the wick, and almost extinct, it is regarded rather as an object of disgust. And such is the light in which even the best of worldly men are viewed, when once God is pleased to convert them to himself; they are no longer welcomed as friends to exhilarate and enliven their companions, but are loathed rather, as the bane of social happiness!

In God's estimation, however, they are proportionably exalted; and are taught to consider "the reproach of Christ as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26)."

In the view of these things, the Psalmist "comforted himself;" saying, "Let your tender mercies come unto me, that I may live; for your Law is my delight. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause; but I will meditate in your precepts, verses 77-78."

The same sources of comfort are ever open unto us also.

Our blessed Lord speaks of this treatment as the certain portion of all his people, "You shall be hated by all men, for my name's sake, [Matthew 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22)." And does he represent this as a matter for grief and sorrow? Far from it; he tells us rather to "rejoice and leap for joy, because great will be our reward in Heaven! [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12)." Besides, in these afflictions we are made "partakers of Christ's sufferings;" and by means of them "the Spirit of glory and of God is made more visibly and more abundantly to rest upon us;" and though, "on the part of our enemies, God is evil spoken of and dishonored, on our part he is glorified, 1 Peter 4:13-14," and, to crown the whole, we are assured, that, "if we suffer thus with Christ, we shall also in due time be glorified together, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

And are not these declarations abundantly sufficient to comfort us, under all that we can be called to suffer for Christ's sake? No doubt they are; and, therefore, if we participate with David in his trials and his graces, we shall, both in this life and the next, be partakers also of his consolations.

**Learn**, then, from this subject,

1. What **expectations** to form.

You must not dream of receiving honor from man; but be contented with the honor that comes from God, [John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.44); You must expect to go through "honor and dishonor, through evil report as well as good report, 2 Corinthians 6:8."

2. What **conduct** to pursue.

Do not be cast down when these trials come upon you; but submit to them, as sent of God for your good; and "rejoice that you are counted worthy to endure them for the Lord's sake! [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41)."

3. What **recompense** to look for.

Do not be anxious for the approbation of men, if only you may but approve yourselves to God. In a little time you will stand at his judgment-seat; and then you shall receive a testimony from him, and "your righteousness shall appear as the noon-day." If "the Lord Jesus does but confess you before his Father and his holy angels," it will be no grief to you that you have suffered for confessing him, [Matthew 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32). A crown of righteousness and glory will be an ample recompense for all the hatred and contempt that an ungodly world could pour upon you!

#704

SERIOUS AND SPEEDY CONVERSION TO GOD RECOMMENDED

**[Psalm 119:59-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.59-60)**

"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto your testimonies. I made haste, and did not delay to keep your commandments."

At what period of David's life these words were written, we are not informed; if in his early youth, they relate to his first conversion to God; but if in his middle or more advanced life, they declare the daily habit of his soul. Under any circumstances they are very instructive.

To young people they show that it is never too early to begin a life of entire devotedness to God. To those engaged in business of any kind, they manifest that, while in the world, they should not be of the world, but in the midst of all their cares they should preserve their minds in a spiritual and heavenly state. To the great and noble, yes, to princes and kings, they hold forth a solemn admonition to imitate the Jewish monarch, and to be as eminent in piety, as they are elevated above others in state and dignity. This all may learn from them: that if ever we would find acceptance with God in the great day, we must turn to him,

I. With care and diligence.

**Thoughtlessness** is the source of almost all the evil that exists.

Men will not give themselves the trouble to look back upon their past conduct. They take for granted that all has been right, or at least not materially wrong; and that they have done nothing that calls for any particular humiliation before God. Of this the prophet Jeremiah warns, [Jeremiah 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.6); as does our Lord also of the Jews in his day, [John 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19-20).

Nor will men take much pains to ascertain the path of duty in reference to what is future; they desire rather to act from the impulse of the moment; nor have they any apprehensions that they shall offend God by anything that they may do. "They do what is right in their own eyes," without inquiring whether it is right in God's sight, or not; or whether he remembers it, or not, [Hosea 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.2).

But we should compare our actions carefully with the Word of God.

The sacred volume is the only perfect standard of truth and virtue. If we satisfy ourselves with the opinions of men and the customs of the world, we shall be sure to err.

We should take God's Word, and try our thoughts and ways by it. In particular, we should notice what God has testified to us in his gospel; and see whether in our spirit and conduct we are such as he requires us to be.

In this lies the vast difference between the standard of the world and that of God. The world regards nothing but our outward conduct, and that chiefly in reference to the welfare of society. Whereas God has respect to all our dispositions towards Him, and to all our motives and principles of action towards men.

We should take the Scripture then as our touchstone; and see how far the whole habit of our minds accords with what is required of us there, and what we see exemplified in the New Testament saints. Yes, we should set Christ himself before us, and try ourselves by the standard of his perfection.

And, having ascertained what God's Word requires, we should rectify our lives according to it.

We must "turn," not our thoughts only, but "our feet" also, unto his testimonies. Having found out our past errors, we should humble ourselves for them, and determine, through grace, to run into them no more; and having discovered "the good old way," we should strive, through grace, to "walk in it."

As for obstacles of any kind, we should not regard them. We should have it settled in our minds, that "the high-way of holiness" is the only road that will lead to Heaven; and we should resolve, that, however narrow and unfrequented it may be, we will walk in it, even though earth and Hell should conspire to obstruct our progress [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14). This is the advice given us by the voice of inspiration, [Lamentations 3:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.40); and to follow it is the duty, the interest, the happiness, of every human being! [Ecclesiastes 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.13). [Luke 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.42).

In this however there should be no delay.

II. We should all address ourselves to this work with promptitude and decision.

Next to utter thoughtlessness, is the evil of **procrastination**.

There are none so blind as not to know that they have some occasion for repentance, or so hardened as to have formed a determined resolution that they will never repent. All have a faint purpose in their minds, that at some future period they will repent; but then they put it off at present, in expectation of some "more convenient season."

The young think that they have time enough before them, and that any great attention to religion is unsuited to their age.

The busy are so engaged in their several concerns, that they think they may well be excused attending to religion, until a time of greater leisure.

Everyone finds some excuse for himself, and puts off the evil day, in hopes that some period will arrive when he shall be better disposed to the great work of turning unto God.

But it is folly and madness to defer this important work!

It must be done; or else we inevitably and eternally perish; No man can call an hour his own. "We know not what a day, an hour, a moment, may bring forth!" While we are looking for days and years to come, God may say, "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you." The difficulty of the work increases daily. The force of habit is exceeding great; and the longer we fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind—the more difficult it will be to mortify and subdue them!

We are in danger also of provoking God to withdraw from us all the assistances of his Spirit. We may "grieve the Holy Spirit," yes, may "quench" also his sacred motions. God has said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man;" and if once he says respecting us, "Let them alone," our doom is sealed as surely as if we were already gone beyond redemption.

How awful is the state of those who are taken unprepared! What "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth" will they experience, cursing their own folly, and vainly wishing it were possible for them to have another opportunity afforded them for working out their salvation! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10).

Say then whether any man should defer one hour this necessary work! Surely we should "make haste, and not delay, to keep God's commandments. See [Hebrews 3:7-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-14)."

That in this great work you may not miscarry, we would subjoin some useful **advice**.

Cry mightily to God, and seek from him,

1. Impartiality in judging.

Self-love always prompts us to form a favorable estimate of our own thoughts and conduct. If we search at all, we search rather for excuses than for sins; for grounds of self-approbation, rather than of self-reproach. But what folly is this! God will form his estimate aright, whether we do or not; and by his own estimate he will judge us in the last day.

Professors of religion, no less than others, are warped by self-love; and there are thousands whose spirit and conduct are directly at variance with the Gospel, while yet they boast of themselves as lights in a dark world! O search your hearts, as the Jews searched their houses for leaven; or as you would search a room for jewels which you had lost. You would not hastily shut your eyes, and say: There is no jewel here; but you would be examining every corner, to find as many as possibly you could; not content to leave so much as one undiscovered. If such impartiality were once exercised by us in detecting our sins, we would not be far from the kingdom of God.

2. Fidelity in acting.

Were a traveler, after long and laborious search, to find the true way to the place where he was journeying, he would retrace his steps, and proceed in the path which led to the place of his destination. It might be less pleasant than his former path; but still he would walk in it.

Do not say then that a life of entire devotedness to God is difficult, or that the ways of Christ and his Apostles would make you singular, or require sacrifices on your part. Be it so; but still you must go forward; you must "not confer with flesh and blood;" you must give yourselves up, in body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord. You must strive to "walk altogether as Christ walked," and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

3. Firmness in persevering.

It is comparatively easy to begin well; the difficulty lies in persevering. The fear of death, or some strong impression on our minds, will operate for a time; but, if there is not a root of grace in us, we shall soon turn back to our evil ways. And, if we do that, we make our state really worse than it was before we thought of our ways at all, [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.21).

O "be not weary in well doing." Make up your mind to encounter difficulties, and to endure hardships; and know that the end will richly repay for all the difficulties of the way!

#705

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

**[Psalm 119:68](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.68)**

"You are good, and do good; teach me your statutes."

The attributes of God, if considered only in a speculative view, must excite our admiration; but, if contemplated in reference to our state and conduct, they will be to us a source of unspeakable comfort, and a spring of incessant activity. What emotions a knowledge of the Divine goodness will produce in the soul, we see in the words before us; in discoursing upon which we shall notice,

I. The goodness of God.

In conformity with the text, we shall call your attention to,

1. God's **essential** goodness.

This is not an indiscriminate regard to all, whether they be good or evil; for such a regard would not consist with justice, or holiness, or truth; but it is a general benevolence towards the whole creation, operating incessantly for the good of the whole. The manner in which it reveals itself is as various as the states of men; but, however diversified its operations may be, it is the same principle in God.

God's goodness is the sum of all his perfections.

Towards the undeserving, it is grace;  
to the ill-deserving, it is mercy;  
to the indigent, it is bounty;  
to the distressed, it is pity and compassion;  
towards the impenitent, it is forbearance;  
to the obstinate and incorrigible, it is justice.

This is the view which God himself gives us of his goodness. Moses prays for a sight of God's glory; God promises to show him his goodness; and then represents it as consisting in an united exercise of all his perfections, [Exodus 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-19); [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7). In this view, goodness resides in him necessarily, in him only, and in him continually.

2. God's **communicative** goodness.

This he manifests to the world at large. When first he created the world, he formed everything "very good." And if we look around us, we shall be constrained to say, "The earth is full of his goodness."

Towards man in particular, his goodness is more abundantly displayed.

Towards the ungodly he has shown it, by giving his only dear Son to die for them, and his Spirit to instruct them; yes, he has set apart an order of men also to entreat them in his name to accept the offered salvation.

Towards the godly he has abounded yet still more in the exceeding riches of his grace; for, in addition to all that he has done for the ungodly, he has made his Word effectual for their conversion; and he watches over them with paternal care, supplying all their needs, and protecting them in all their dangers; and, to complete the whole, he will crown them finally with eternal glory! [Psalm 103:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-5).

Such a view of God as this cannot but lead us to adopt,

II. The **petition** grounded upon God's goodness.

The petition itself is such as all ought to offer for themselves.

By "the statutes" of God we understand both the truths he has revealed, and the precepts he has enjoined. Of these we are by nature ignorant; nor can we by mere human exertions ever acquire a right understanding of them, 1 Corinthians 2:14. We must be taught of God; our eyes must be opened by his Spirit; only then shall we keep his statutes, when God himself shall "write them on the fleshy tablets of our hearts."

But the petition has peculiar force as grounded on a discovery of God's goodness; for, in that, as in a looking-glass, we see,

1. Our **duties**.

The law of God primarily declares our duty towards him; but none ever attain a just knowledge of that duty from the law alone; they cannot see the necessity of loving God with all their hearts, until they have some idea of the obligations they lie under to him for the stupendous work of redemption. But let the love of God in Christ Jesus be once clearly revealed to the soul, and the excellency of the law will instantly appear; and obedience to it will be considered as perfect freedom.

2. Our **defects**.

We are naturally averse to acknowledge our vileness and wickedness. But a sight of the Divine goodness softens the mind and heart, and renders them sincere. Hence the more we are acquainted with God, the more we know of ourselves; and the more we have experienced of his love—the more we "abhor ourselves for our ingratitude to him, and our lack of conformity to his image! [Job 42:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5-6). [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63)."

3. Our **encouragements**.

Wherever we look, we have no encouragement but in God. Indeed, if only we are acquainted with his goodness, we need no other encouragement; for, what will not He do, who is so good in himself? And what will He refuse us, who has done so much for us already! [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32). Such considerations as these are sufficient to counterbalance every difficulty that the world, or the flesh, or the devil can place in our way. Having this God for our God, we can lack nothing for time or for eternity.

#706

THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTION

**[Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.71)**

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes."

David had "been afflicted from his youth up"; and we think it highly probable that to that very circumstance he was indebted, under God, for those extraordinary attainments in devotion and holiness, which have rendered him a pattern for the saints in all future ages. By means of his trials he was constrained to take refuge in his God; and by constant communion with God, he obtained a deep insight into his revealed will, and a rich experience of his super-abounding grace.

This seems at least to have been his own view of the case, long after his afflictions had ceased; for to his familiarity with affliction he ascribes his enlarged acquaintance with the statutes of his God, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."

In confirmation of his testimony, we shall show,

I. The benefit of affliction, as leading to saving knowledge.

Affliction, in itself considered, is an evil; but, if viewed in connection with the benefits resulting from it, it may justly be esteemed "a good." Thousands there are who have reason to bless God for affliction, as instrumental to the bringing of them to the knowledge of a Savior, whom, without such trials, they would have continued to neglect. Indeed it is eminently and extensively useful in this view:

1. Affliction often opens our ears to spiritual instruction.

People who are at ease, however eager they may be after human knowledge, have no desire after that which is spiritual and divine. If it is offered to them, they reject it; if it is pressed upon them, they cast it behind their backs with indignation and scorn. To one who would instruct them in arts or sciences, they would feel thankful; but to one who would lead them to the knowledge of the true God, they make no return, but that of contempt and hatred! [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19). [Matthew 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.26).

But when heavy affliction is come upon them, they are softened; they will listen to advice; they will even be thankful for it; they will read the Scriptures, or some other religious book; and will pay considerable attention to those subjects which hitherto have provoked only their derision.

With this view, and for the production of this very effect, God frequently grants to send affliction, [Job 36:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.8-10); and those who are brought by it to this measure of thoughtfulness about their souls, have reason rather to be thankful for it as a benefit, than to complain of it as a judgment.

2. Affliction often makes us sensible of our need of better things than this world can give.

In the midst of carnal enjoyments a man wishes for nothing more; but when trials of various kinds oppress his mind, then his taste for earthly gratifications is weakened; their insufficiency to remove, or even to alleviate, trouble is felt; and they no longer afford him that kind of satisfaction which they once did. Amusement and entertainment have lost their relish; his mind is indisposed for them; they have become to him insipid, undesirable, irksome, odious. Something more substantial is now wanted—something on which his soul may rest, as conducive to its present and eternal welfare.

This was the effect produced upon the Prodigal. While he could revel in luxury and pleasure, he cared for nothing else. But when his money was expended, and he was a prey to poverty, and could find no help, no pity, from man, then he began to reflect on the abundance that there was in his Father's house, and to desire a participation of it, though in the lowest and most menial office there. And had he not reason to be thankful for the trials which produced so blessed an effect? In like manner then we also should acknowledge as a blessing every trial that is sent us for the accomplishment of so good an end.

3. Affliction often drives us to God in prayer.

Those who never called upon God in the time of their prosperity, are often stirred up to seek him in a season of adversity. "In their affliction," says God, "they will seek me early, [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15);" and to the same effect the Prophet testifies, "Lord, in trouble they went to you; they poured forth a prayer when your chastening was upon them [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.16)." In the 107th Psalm this effect of troubles is marked in every instance, "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, verses 6, 13, 19, 28;" and in every instance this was the prelude to their deliverance.

Who then that experiences this effect from his trials has not reason to be thankful for them? Let it only be said of us, "Behold, he prays;" and we shall have no cause for complaint, though we should have been struck blind, like Saul, and had our blindness continued to the last hour of our lives! [Acts 9:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.3-4); [Acts 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.8).

4. Affliction often brings us to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Of itself, affliction cannot effect this; but when accompanied by Divine grace, it often does. Indeed where a willingness to receive instruction, and a desire after spiritual blessings are excited in the soul, and issue in fervent prayer to God—there we may reasonably hope that all spiritual blessings will flow into the soul. God will not allow any to seek his face in vain. Even though, like Manasseh, we may have brought down God's wrath upon us by the most heinous iniquities—yet if we humble ourselves under his chastisements, and implore mercy at his hands, we shall, like him, be heard, and be made stupendous monuments of his power and grace! [2 Chronicles 33:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.11-13).

Did David ever regret the sufferings by which he was thus brought to enjoy peace with God? Neither shall we, whatever trials may be made subservient to this blessed end.

But will the end really compensate for the means used to effect it? Yes! And to prove that it will, we shall proceed to show,

II. The blessedness of spiritual knowledge, though gained by affliction.

Such knowledge as we are speaking of, the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, is indeed inestimable. Let us view it:

1. As compared with the price paid for it.

It is said by Solomon, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it!" Now as we have before spoken of affliction as the means of bringing us to the knowledge of the truth, we may, in popular language, call it, The price paid for knowledge. Whatever then the affliction be, we do not hesitate to say that it is richly recompensed by the fruit which it produces.

Suppose the affliction to be of a temporal nature; we have been bereaved of our dearest friends and relatives; we have suffered the loss of all our property, and been reduced to poverty; our health also has been destroyed, so that we are sinking under an accumulation of woes. Suppose our case as distressing as that of Job himself; still, if it have been sanctified to our eternal good, we can call it by no other name than, A blessing in disguise!

Did Job, when brought to a deeper view of his own depravity, and to a richer discovery of the Divine perfections, regret the sufferings which had been overruled for that end? Did he not rather abhor himself for having judged too hastily respecting the designs of God; and cordially approve of those dispensations, which in his haste he had been ready to condemn? Thus shall we also do, when once we have "seen the end of the Lord, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)." We may in our haste exclaim, "All these things are against me!" but at last we shall testify of all God's most afflictive dispensations, as Joseph did, that "God meant them for good! [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20)."

But suppose the trials to be of a spiritual nature. These are yet far more afflictive, "A wounded spirit who can bear?" How grievously David was oppressed by them, we are informed in many of his Psalms. See [Psalm 38:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-8); [Psalm 77:3-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.3-9); [Psalm 88:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.6-7); [Psalm 102:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.1-10). But yet his testimony in our text was the real dictate of his heart. And we may ask of others: Were the wounds which brought you to the heavenly Physician too severe? Do you not number them among your richest mercies? Has not every loss been more than compensated in the acquisition of salvation; and every pang more than recompensed in the peace and joy to which, through the knowledge of Christ, you have attained?

It was a matter of just computation with the Apostle, that "the sufferings of this present life (whatever they may be) are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!"

2. As estimated according to the intrinsic worth of spiritual knowledge.

But who can ever rightly appreciate its worth? Paul "counted all things to be but dross and dung in comparison with it! [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8)." We must be able to estimate all the miseries of Hell, and all the glories of Heaven, before we can form any estimate of its value; and, if we could ascertain the full importance of those, we would still be as far as ever from having a complete conception of the worth of spiritual knowledge; unless we could estimate also all the glory that will accrue to the ever blessed Trinity from the contrivance and execution of this stupendous plan, and the application of this salvation to a ruined world!

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are at ease.

How faint, for the most part, are your desires after spiritual knowledge! Whether you hear, or read, or pray—what formality pervades it all! But, if God has indeed designs of love towards you—then you will be taught by the rod, what you will not learn without it. "He will cause you to pass under the rod, in order that he may bring you into the bond of the covenant." And if lesser trials will not accomplish the purposes of his grace, he will visit you with heavier trials, "from chastening you with rods he will scourge you with scorpions."

Yet do not think that a season of affliction is in itself favorable for the pursuit of spiritual knowledge; it is far otherwise; pains of body, and distress of mind, have a tendency to impede, rather than assist, the exercises of the mind. Ask those who are in deep affliction, whether they find it easy to collect their thoughts, and fix them with energy on the concerns of their souls; and they will bear one uniform testimony, that health is the time to seek the Lord.

Be persuaded then, now while you are at ease, to study "God's statutes," and especially those which declare to us the way of salvation ordained for sinful man. Know that there is no other knowledge of any importance whatever in comparison with this; and that, if even the most grievous sufferings should be welcomed as accessary to the attainment of it, much more must it deserve all the time and attention that can be bestowed upon it. You never need fear that you will hereafter have occasion to complain, that its fruits did not repay you for the cultivation of it.

2. To those that are under any great affliction.

The rod under which you suffer has a voice, to which you should listen with all possible attention! "Hear the rod and the One who appointed it! [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9)." It is sent to you in love and mercy. God designs to teach you, by means of it, many things which you would not so well learn without it.

It may be that you are already instructed in the Gospel of Christ; but yet there is much of which you are ignorant; and many things which you do know, need to be known by you in a very different manner. Even our blessed Lord himself, "though he was a Son, learned obedience by the things which he suffered," yes, and "was made perfect through sufferings." Be content to have God's work carried on and perfected in you in the same way; and be more anxious to obtain the benefit which your affliction is sent to impart, than to get rid of the affliction itself.

If your tribulation works in you patience and experience and hope—then learn to glory in it, and to number it among your richest blessings. And do not wait until the affliction is removed, to acknowledge God's goodness to you in sending it; but now, while you are under the affliction, get it so improved and sanctified to the good of your soul, that you may be able to say, "It is good for me, O Lord, that I am afflicted; for by means of it I learn your statutes;" I see, "it is in very faithfulness that you afflict me;" and, if only you "make me a partaker of your holiness send me what you will, and when you will; be the cup never so bitter to my taste, I will say, "Not my will, but your be done!"

#707

THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD

**[Psalm 119:76](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.76)**

"May Your loving-kindness be my comfort, according to Your Word to Your servant."

The peculiar construction of this Psalm forbids us to look for much connection between its several parts. It is composed of short detached sentences, committed to writing at different times as they occurred to the mind of the Royal penman, and afterwards reduced to a certain kind of order; eight of them beginning with the same letter through all the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

If however we take the words of our text as connected with the preceding verse, we must understand it as a prayer that a sense of God's loving-kindness might be given him to comfort him under his afflictions. This sense we shall not exclude; though we shall not entirely limit it to this; for, if we take the words by themselves, they contain some peculiarly important hints, which we are desirous to impress upon your minds.

In elucidating them, we propose to show,

I. What the Scriptures speak respecting the loving-kindness of God.

They are full of this glorious subject; they declare:

1. That the loving-kindness of God is the one source of all the blessings which we enjoy.

Survey the luster and use of the heavenly bodies, the rich fruitfulness of the earth, the structure of the human body, or the faculties of the soul. Whence do they proceed? Who is their author; and by what motive was he actuated in bestowing them upon us? Can they be traced to any other source than the kindness of our God? Behold the gift—the stupendous gift of God's only dear Son, and of salvation by him! Can this be traced to any other source? See [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16). [Titus 3:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.4-5). [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7).

2. That the loving-kindness of God is our chief support under all trials.

We will grant something to philosophy; and acknowledge that it can fortify the mind in some degree; but it is not to be compared with religion in point of efficacy. That may silence murmurs, and produce a reluctant submission; but this will turn trials into an occasion of joy and glorying, [Romans 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1-3). [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41); [Acts 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.25).

3. That a comfortable sense of the loving-kindness of God is the privilege of all the Lord's people.

God promises "his Holy Spirit unto all those who ask him." That Spirit shall be in them "a spirit of adoption," a witness, a pledge, a seal, a Comforter. From the days of Abel to the present hour, God has delighted to rejoice the souls of his servants by the testimonies of his love.

But, if the loving-kindness of God is thus manifested to his people, it may be asked:

II. Why David prayed that the loving-kindness of God might be for his comfort?

1. Because, without a sense of God's loving-kindness, his trials would have been insupportable.

David was exposed to many and severe trials; and, if he had not been favored with peculiar supports, he would have sunk under them. This he often mentions, [1 Samuel 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.6) and [Psalm 116:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.3-5). Paul also acknowledges his obligation to God for similar supports, [2 Corinthians 1:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.3-5). When such manifestations were withdrawn, even Jesus himself almost fainted, [Matthew 27:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.46). But when they were given, the weakest women were made triumphant over all the malice of their persecutors [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35).

2. Because, though all are partakers of God's general kindness, all do not find it to their comfort.

How many have the blessings of health and wealth, who taste nothing of God's loving-kindness in them, but make them the occasions of more flagrant opposition to his will! How many have been restored to health, who by their subsequent misconduct have turned that mercy into a real curse! Above all, how many have made Christ himself a stumbling-block instead of a Savior, and "the gospel a savor of death," when it might have been to them "a savor of life!"

Thus would all men do, if they were left to themselves; even Hezekiah's miraculous recovery, and Paul's visit to the third heavens, would have issued only in their deeper condemnation, if God had not given grace to the one, and "a thorn in the flesh" to the other, to counteract the propensities of their fallen nature. Well then might David make this a matter of prayer to God, when none but God could impart to him this benefit.

3. Because, if God's loving-kindness is not to our comfort, it will be, in a most awful manner, to our discomfort.

It is no light matter to abuse the merciful kindness of God! The day is coming, when every mercy we have received, must be accounted for; and when "it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those" who have slighted a preached gospel. Every mercy therefore should be received with a holy fear and jealousy, lest it should prove only an occasion of more aggravated guilt, and heavier condemnation.

APPLICATION.

Let us more frequently reflect on the loving-kindness of God, [Psalm 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.3); [Psalm 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3). Let us meditate on it especially in seasons of trouble, [Psalm 143:78](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.78). And let us endeavor to requite it by devoting ourselves unreservedly to his service! [Psalm 116:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12) and [Isaiah 63:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.7).

#708

DAVID'S BOASTING EXPLAINED AND VINDICATED

**[Psalm 119:97-100](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.97-100)**

"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.  
 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.  
 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.  
 I have more understanding than the ancients, for I obey your precepts."

Nothing is more hateful than boasting. To boast of our superiority to others, as the Pharisees did, saying, "I thank you, O Lord, that I am not as other men," is to betray an entire lack of Christian humility, and an utter ignorance of our own state. But of all boasting, that which arises from a conceit of our own wisdom is perhaps the most odious and the most contemptible. "Do not be wise in your own conceit, [Proverbs 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.7). [Romans 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.16)," is a caution repeatedly given us in the Holy Scriptures; and an inattention to it will assuredly expose us to God's heavy displeasure, [Isaiah 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.21).

Yet there are occasions whereon we may, in appearance, transgress this duty, and yet be blameless. Paul was on some occasions necessitated to assert his claim to public authority, and his right to dictate to the Church of God; and though he apologized for his conduct in this respect, and called himself "a fool" for giving way to it, he yet felt it his duty, on the whole, to maintain the truth against those who opposed it, and to demand from others that deference which his Apostolic character authorised him to expect, [2 Corinthians 10:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.7-11); [2 Corinthians 11:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.16-18); [2 Corinthians 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.11).

In the passage before us, I must confess, David had no such call to exalt himself above others. But he wrote for the benefit of the Church of God in all ages; and therefore, while conveying general truths, "he transferred them to himself," in order that he might speak to better effect. See [1 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.6). His object was to show, that every one who took the Word of God for his guide would be so elevated by it above the most exalted of merely human characters, that he might justly arrogate to himself a wisdom superior to them all; since an unconverted character, whoever he might be, had no higher wisdom than that which was human; while the man who was taught by the Word and Spirit of God, possessed a wisdom that was truly divine.

In this view, then, I propose to vindicate the language of my text; and to show, that David, in obeying the Word of God, was:  
"wiser than his enemies," with all their subtlety;  
and "wiser than his teachers," notwithstanding all their learning;  
and "wiser than the ancients," in despite of all their experience.

I. Of every one who is obedient to God's Word, it may be said that he lives more fully to the ends for which the Holy Scripture was given.

For what was the Scripture given, but to be a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths? This being the case, what shall we say of the man who neglects to study the Inspired Volume? What should we say of a mariner, who, in navigating a sea that was full of rocks and quicksands, should neglect to consult his chart and his compass, or should proceed in his voyage with the same kind of confidence, in opposition to their dictates, as he would if he were following the course which they prescribed? Let him in other respects be ever so wise, no one would hesitate to commend the circumspect sailor as wiser than he.

Then in this view, may the divinely-instructed follower of Christ account himself wiser than others, whether friends or enemies, if, when they enjoy the advantage of this infallible guide, they refuse to consult its dictates, or to follow its directions. If no one would hesitate to pronounce this judgment in a case where only the bodily life was concerned, much less would anyone doubt where the interest at stake is nothing less than that of the immortal soul!

II. Of every one who is obedient to God's Word, it may be said that he manifests a more befitting regard to the wonders revealed in it.

Let anyone contemplate the wonders of redemption and say, whether he can be wise who neglects to search into them, and to improve them for the good of his soul? But the man who receives "the testimony of Christ," and labors to have it "confirmed in his own soul," is wise; and, when comparing himself with those who despise the Gospel, whatever superiority they may possess in other respects, may, without any undue arrogance, account himself wiser than they. "The very angels in Heaven are desiring to look into these unsearchable mysteries;" and, "if we disregard them, what wisdom can be in us? [Jeremiah 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.9)."

III. Of every one who is obedient to God's Word, it may be said that he consults supremely those interests, which the Scriptures declare to be alone worthy of his attention.

What can the whole world offer to a man which is worthy to be put in competition with his soul? The concerns of the soul are declared by our blessed Lord to be "the one thing needful." Let the most learned man upon the face of the earth neglect these concerns, and the most unlettered man make them the great objects of his undivided attention; shall we hesitate to say which of the two is the wiser man? He who is wise for time only, is a fool; but he who is wise for eternity, is truly wise. "The fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom;" and he who possesses it not, has not ever yet passed the threshold of Wisdom's porch; but "a good understanding have all they who cultivate the fear of the Lord; and the praise of their conduct shall endure forever."

Let me, in conclusion, give you,

1. A word of **caution**.

Take not occasion, from these words of David, to think lightly of self-delight and self-applause. David was no boaster; on the contrary, no one was ever lower in his own estimation than he. Humility is the most prominent feature of all the Scripture saints. "Less than the least of all saints" was the character which Paul assumed; and, "if he gloried at any time, it was of his infirmities alone," that his Lord and Savior might be the more glorified in him, 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Likewise I would recommend to you to "take the lowest place," and, instead of exalting yourselves above others, to "prefer others in honor before yourselves," and "to esteem others better than yourselves, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10). [Philippians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3);" "for not he who commends himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commends, [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18)."

2. A word of **advice**.

"Love the Word of God." Truly, it is deserving of all your love; and you should "esteem it more than your necessary food."

Next, "meditate upon it all the day." Many read the Scriptures without profit, because they do not ruminate upon them, and digest them in their souls. Let some short portion of God's Word be selected for your meditation every day; and you cannot fail to profit by it, especially if your meditations are turned into prayer.

Lastly, take the Word as the only rule of your life. This is essential to the Christian character. A speculative knowledge, however extensive and accurate, will avail you nothing; it is the practical and experimental knowledge alone that can benefit the soul. The very use of the Scriptures is, to "perfect the man of God, and thoroughly to furnish him unto all good works." This it is which will make you truly wise, or, rather, that will prove you to be so; for then will the Scripture "have had its perfect work," and you will be "wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus!"

#709

THE TRUE TEST OF GENUINE RELIGION IN THE SOUL

**[Psalm 119:128](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.128)**

"I esteem all your precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way!"

Religion is the same in every age. The doctrines of it, though they have been more fully and clearly revealed under the Christian dispensation, have never varied in substance; nor has the practice of it ever changed, except in the observance of rites and ceremonies. To love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves, was the essence of true religion in the days of Abraham and of Moses; and so it is at this day. Doubtless there can be no true religion where the Gospel is despised; but the Gospel may be highly approved as a system of beliefs, while the heart is far from being right with God! It is not by their profession of any *principles* that we are to judge of men's spiritual states, but by the practical effects of those principles on their hearts and lives. Our blessed Lord has established this as the only true criterion, the only adequate test: "You shall know them by their *fruits*!"

Now the genuine fruit of piety is as clearly exhibited in the words before us, as in any part of the Inspired Volume. The passage is peculiarly worthy of notice, because in the writer of it were combined the fullest conviction of the understanding, together with the strongest affections of the heart.

In his judgment, "he esteemed God's precepts to be right."

In his heart, "he hated" everything that was opposed to them.

May God of his infinite mercy inspire us with the same heavenly opinions, while we consider these two things:

I. The Christian character as here delineated.

In the text is drawn a broad line of distinction between the child of God, and every other person on earth.

Christians are either nominal or genuine. Each class has gradations, from the highest to the lowest; but between the two classes there is an immense gulf that separates them as far as the east is from the west. To ascertain to which of the two we belong, is of infinite importance; but self-love blinds our eyes, and renders the discovery of it extremely difficult.

This Scripture however holds up, as it were, a mirror before us; and, if we will look steadfastly into it, we may discern with great precision whether we are lost or saved.

The difference between the two classes is this:

The nominal Christian, however eminent he may in appearance be, is partial in his regard for God's precepts, [Malachi 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.9).

The true Christian approves and loves them all without exception, [Psalm 119:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.6).

The **nominal Christian**, we say, is partial in his regard for God's precepts. He may esteem those commands which countenance his own particular party. The Papist, for instance, and the Protestant, will glory in those passages of Holy Writ which seem to justify their adherence to their respective modes of worship, and to afford them ground for believing that theirs is the more Scriptural and Apostolic Church.

The various denominations of Protestants also will manifest an ardent zeal for the support of their respective tenets, and be almost ready to anathematize each other, as not giving sufficient weight to those particular passages, on which they severally found their respective differences. They not only esteem their own grounds of faith "to be right," but they "hate" the opinions opposed to them "as erroneous and false."

The nominal Christian may also love those precepts which do not materially condemn him. The man who is sober, chaste, honest, just, temperate, and benevolent—may take a real pleasure in such passages of Scripture as inculcate the virtues in which he supposes himself to have excelled; and may feel an indignation against the ways by which those precepts are grossly violated.

He may yet further delight in such precepts as, according to his interpretation of them, afford him ground for rejecting the Gospel. No passages in all the Word of God are more delightful to him than such as these, "Do not be righteous overmuch;" and "What does the Lord your God require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" He has no fear lest he should not be righteous enough; nor is he very anxious to inquire what is implied in walking humbly with God; it is sufficient for him that these passages are, in his eyes, opposed to what he calls wild enthusiasm; setting aside the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus, and of a life of entire devotedness to his service. His hatred of all passages that bear an opposite aspect, is in exact proportion to his zeal for these.

But, while such parts of Scripture are approved by him, does he love all that the Inspired Volume contains? Does he love those precepts which are most sublime and spiritual? No! It is no pleasure to him to hear of "setting his affections on things above," or of having "his conversation in Heaven;" nor does it afford him any gratification to be told, that the measure of holiness which he must aspire after, is that which was exhibited in the Lord Jesus, whose example he is to follow in the whole of his spirit and temper, his conversation and conduct, "walking in all things as he walked."

Nor does he particularly desire those precepts which require much self-denial. "To crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," and to root out from his soul every evil, though it is dear to him "as a right eye," or necessary to him as "a right hand," and to have a compliance with these precepts as his only alternative between that and the taking his portion in "Hell-fire," is no pleasing sound in his ears, notwithstanding it proceeds from the meek and lowly Jesus! [Mark 9:42-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.42-48).

Least of all is he gratified with precepts that strike at his besetting sin.

The proud man does not delight to hear the workings of pride delineated;  
nor the covetous man the evils of covetousness depicted;  
nor the mirthful and debauched the folly of their ways exposed;  
nor the self-righteous man the delusive nature of his hopes declared.

No! They are all ready to deride the statements that condemn their ways, just as the Pharisees derided our Lord, when he had unveiled their covetous and hypocritical devices, "The Pharisees were covetous, and they derided Him." The hearts of these people rise against all such doctrines; and with no little bitterness they exclaim, "In saying this, you reproach us! [Luke 11:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.45)."

The **true Christian**, on the contrary, approves and loves all the commands of God; both those which are evangelical, and those which are moral.

He loves those Scriptural commands which are evangelical. It is no grief to him to be told, that he must renounce all dependence on his own righteousness, and rely entirely on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is rather with the most heartfelt delight that he hears those gracious commands,

"Look unto me, and be saved!"

"Come unto me, and I will give you rest!"

"Believe on me, and have everlasting life."

"He esteems these precepts to be right;" he feels them to be exactly suited to his necessities; he knows and is assured, that his own righteousness is only as "filthy rags;" and that in any other garment than the robe of Christ's righteousness, it is impossible for him to stand in the presence of a holy God.

He sees also that this mode of justification before God is the only one which can consist with the honor of God's justice, and with the demands of his law. Hence whatever opposes this way of salvation, "he hates!" Yes, he shudders at the very thought of claiming anything on the ground of his own worthiness, saying, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He thankfully traces all his mercies to the covenant made from all eternity between the Father and the Son; and to that covenant he looks, as "ordered in all things, and sure;" and from his inmost soul he says of it, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire!"

Moreover, as the duty of coming to Christ, so the duty of "living by faith in Christ," the duty of abiding in him as branches of the living vine, of receiving from his fullness continual supplies of grace and strength, and of "growing up into him in all things, as our living Head." The duty, I say, of making him "our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption," our all, and of glorying in him, and in him alone—all this is heard by the true Christian with ineffable delight. He desires that Christ should have all the glory. He sees it to be "right," that He who came down from Heaven, and died upon the cross to save him, and ascended up on high, and has all fullness treasured up in him for the use of his people, and who dwells in them "as their very life." I say, he sees it "right," that this adorable Savior should "be exalted, and extolled, and be very high;" yes, that he should be on earth, as he is in Heaven—the one object of our adoration, and the continual theme of our praise. And, while a blind and ignorant world are ready to blame his zeal for the Redeemer's glory as carried to excess, his constant grief is that he cannot love him more, and serve him better.

Nor is the true Christian less delighted with the moral Scriptural precepts, not one of which would he desire to have relaxed or moderated in the smallest degree. Instead of wishing them to be lowered to the standard of his attainments, or regarding them as grievous on account of their purity, he loves them for their purity, [Psalm 119:140](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.140), and would esteem it his highest privilege to be conformed to them. He is well persuaded, that they are all "holy, and just, and good;" and he loves them as perfective of his nature, and conducive to his happiness.

He loves them, I say, as the perfection of his nature. For what is *holiness*, but a conformity to the Divine image—just as *sin* is to the image of the devil? It was by transgression that man lost that resemblance to God which was stamped upon him at his first creation; and it is by the new-creating influence of the Spirit quickening him to a course of holy obedience, that this resemblance is gradually restored. Conscious of this, he pants after holiness, desiring to "be changed into his Redeemer's image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord."

Nor does he love God's precepts less as conducive to his happiness; for sin and misery are inseparable, as holiness also and true happiness are. What is the language of every precept in the Decalogue? It is this, 'Be holy, and be happy.' Of this the is convinced; and he finds, by daily experience, that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward," and that "Wisdom's ways are indeed ways of pleasantness and peace!"

At the same time, the genuine believer "hates every false way!" Every deviation from the perfect rule of righteousness is painful to him. He "hates it;" and hates himself on account of it. As a touch, which would scarcely be felt in any other part of the body, will occasion the severest anguish to the eye—so those thoughts or feelings which would be altogether unnoticed by other men, inflict a wound on his conscience, and cause him to go mournfully before the Lord Almighty.

Ask him on such an occasion: What it is that has caused him thus to mourn and weep? Is it that his God has required so much? No, but that he himself has attained so little. He wants to "be sanctified wholly to the Lord, in body, soul, and spirit;" and, could he accomplish the desire of his heart, he would "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

This is the object of his highest ambition; and, when he finds, that, notwithstanding all his efforts, he still falls short of it—he groans inwardly, and says with the Apostle, "O what a wretched man I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?"

Behold, then, the Christian's character as here delineated. To a superficial observer he may not appear to differ much from others; but to those who have had opportunities of discovering the real desires of his soul, he is a perfect contrast with the whole ungodly world.

The very best of nominal Christians are content with low attainments, and plead for indulgences in those sinful things which are agreeable to their corrupt nature. The more sublime and spiritual precepts they soften down to the standard of their own practice; and rather applaud themselves for their excellencies, than loath themselves for their defects.

The true Christian, on the contrary, will admit of no standard but that of absolute perfection; and, wherever he falls short of it, as he does in his very best services, he loathes and "abhors himself in dust and ashes!"

Nor has he any hope of acceptance with God, but in the view of that atonement which was once offered for him on the cross, and of that blood which the Lord Jesus Christ once shed on Calvary to cleanse him from his sins.

We do not mean to say that these defects are subversive of all the Christian's peace; for, if that were the case, who could possess any peace at all? The Christian, notwithstanding his imperfections, has "comfort in the testimony of a good conscience," and in an assurance, that his God will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss;" but he does not on this account allow himself in any sin whatever! The use he makes of his own corruptions is, to cleave the more steadfastly to Christ as his only hope, and to watch and pray the more diligently, that he may be preserved from evil, and be enabled by Divine grace to endure unto the end!

Now this description of the Christian's character leads me to show,

II. The light this verse reflects on the Gospel of Christ.

Three things it suggests to us, namely:

An answer to those who misrepresent the Gospel.

A reproof to those who would abuse the Gospel.

A direction to those who would adorn the Gospel.

First, we may derive from hence, an answer to those who **misrepresent** the Gospel.

It has in all ages been a favorite argument against the Gospel, that it supersedes the necessity of good works, and opens the flood-gates of licentiousness. It was urged repeatedly against Paul himself; who on that account set himself to answer it with all imaginable care, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" And again, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?" To both of these questions he answers with holy indignation, "God forbid!" And, when his enemies went so far as to affirm, that he gave men a licence to sin, saying, "Let us do evil that good may come;" Paul scorned to return any other answer than this, "Their damnation is just!"

And it were greatly to be wished, that those who now so confidently repeat these accusations against the followers of Paul, would reflect on the guilt they incur, and the danger to which, by such calumnies, they expose themselves.

To this present hour the same objections are made to all those statements which resemble Paul's. If we deny to good works the office of justifying the soul—then we are represented as denying the necessity of them altogether. Though these objections have been refuted a thousand times; and should be refuted ten thousand times more, the enemies of the Gospel will still repeat them with as much confidence as ever.

Let them, however, look into our text, and see what David's principles were. Of all the Old Testament saints, there was not one who more determinately sought to be justified by the righteousness of Christ without any works of his own, than he. Hear what is said of him by Paul, in confirmation of the very opinions which Paul himself maintained, "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him! [Romans 4:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.5-8)."

Here we have a full exposition of David's views respecting the Gospel. And how did these views operate on his soul? Did the idea of being justified by a righteousness not his own, a righteousness without works, a righteousness imputed to him, and apprehended solely by faith—did this, I say, make him regardless of good works? No! Look at the text, you Objector, and be convinced No! Look at the text, you Calumniator, and blush.

Search, next, the writings of Paul, and see whether there was any difference in this respect between him and David?

Was there any difference in theory? No, for Paul affirms, that "the grace of God which brings salvation teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present world."

Was there any difference in practice? No, neither David nor any other Saint ever made higher attainments in holiness than Paul, "he was not a whit behind the very chief Apostles."

Perhaps it will be said that the professed followers of Paul differ from him in this respect; and that while in theory they adopt his doctrine, in practice they deny its sanctifying efficacy.

That there are Antinomians in the world, we confess; there were in the days of Christ and his Apostles; some who called Christ, "Lord! Lord! while yet they did not obey the things which he commanded;" and some, who "professed to know God, but in works denied him." And it must be expected, that as corrupt as human nature is, such characters will be found in every age.

But is such Antinomian conduct the necessary result of these principles? Was it so in the days of the Apostles? Or is it so at this day? If justification by faith alone is necessarily productive of laxness in morals, whence comes it that a higher tone of morality is universally expected from those who maintain that doctrine, than from others? Whence is it that the smallest evils in such people are more severely marked, than the most licentious courses of the ungodly world?

To all, then, who misrepresent the Gospel, we would give this reply:

Look at David, and see what the effect of the Gospel had on him.

Look at Paul, and contemplate its effects on him.

Look at the uniform declarations of Scripture, and see what was the life of all the primitive believers.

Look only at the expectations which you yourselves have formed; for, if you see a professor of the Gospel act unworthy of his profession, you deem him inconsistent; which is a proof that both the obligation to holiness is acknowledged on his part, and the performance of it is expected on your part; and consequently, that the Gospel is, by your mutual consent, "a doctrine according to godliness."

From the passage before us, we may in the next place, offer a reproof to those who would **abuse** the Gospel.

We have already acknowledged, and with deep grief we confess it, that there are some people professedly of Antinomian principles, who are so occupied with contemplating what Christ has wrought out for them—that they cannot bestow a thought on what he has engaged to work in them.

To speak of holiness, or any point of duty, they account low, and legal; yes, they think that Christ has by his own obedience to the law superseded the necessity of holiness in us; and that the whole work of salvation is so finished by him, that there remains nothing to be done by us, nothing of repentance for sin, nothing of obedience to God's commands—but solely to maintain confidence in the provisions of God's everlasting Covenant, and to rejoice in God as our God and portion.

As shocking as these opinions are, they have been professed of late to a great extent; and many have been deceived by them. To show how unscriptural they are, we need only refer to the character of David, as drawn in the words of our text:

Does he discard the Word as a rule of life?

Does he pour contempt upon the precepts of God as unworthy of his notice?

No! Throughout all his Psalms David speaks of them as objects of his supreme delight, "O how I love your law! All the day long is my study in it." "I love your precepts above gold; they are sweeter to me than honey and the honey-comb."

To the same effect Paul also speaks, "I consent unto the law that it is good;" and again, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man!" He does, it is true, speak of himself as "dead to the law;" and of the law as dead with respect to him; and from thence, that the marriage bonds, by which the law and we were formerly united, are forever dissolved. But what use does he teach us to make of this liberty? Does he speak of it as freeing us from all moral restraints? No! but as a reason for our giving up ourselves henceforth in a marriage union to Christ as our spiritual husband, that we may bring forth fruit unto God! [Romans 7:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.1-4) with [Galatians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.19).

Now then, we would ask, Were David and Paul right? If so, what must we think of the opinions of these deluded people? Are they more spiritual than David? Have they a deeper insight into the Gospel than Paul? The very circumstance of their discarding all the exhortations of Paul, and casting behind them all his practical instructions—demonstrates that they are, for the present at least, "given up to a delusion, to believe a lie."

Some of them, we trust, do not practically live according to these principles; and, where this is the case, we hope that God, in his mercy, will sooner or later grant them to see their errors. But if they practically carry into effect their antinomian principles, they will have reason to curse the day that ever they were born!

To the younger part of our audience we will beg permission to suggest a few hints on this important subject.

You, when you go into the world, will be in danger of being ensnared by people of this stamp. There is something very imposing in the idea of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, and of making him "all in all." The devout mind is delighted with this thought; and is easily induced to regard with jealousy anything that may be supposed to interfere with it. But be not wise above that which is written; and let nothing tempt you to imagine that you can honor Christ by setting aside any of his commandments. It is by your love and obedience to his commandments that you are to approve yourselves his disciples; and however delighted you may be with the visions of Mount Tabor, you must never forget that you have work also to do in the plain, [Luke 9:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.33); [Luke 9:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.37).

We are far from wishing anyone to be working from self-righteous principles, or in a legal spirit. Nor would we utter a word that should discourage the fullest confidence in God. It is our privilege, doubtless, to trace all our mercies up to his everlasting love, and to view them all as secured to us by covenant and by oath, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18). But then it is no less our privilege to fulfill God's will, and to resemble the holy angels, of whom it is said, that "they do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his Word."

Beware then lest you ever be led off from this ground. Rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for your sins, as your all-prevailing Advocate, and as your living Head. But, while you believe in him, and love him, and rejoice in him, let your faith, and love, and joy, stimulate you to a holy and unreserved obedience. If he has "set your heart at liberty," let the effect be to "make you run with more enlargement in the way of his commandments."

Lastly, we may derive from our text a direction to all who would adorn the Gospel.

"Esteem all God's precepts to be right, and hate every false way." If God has enjoined anything, do not ask whether the world approves of it; nor, if God has forbidden anything, inquire of the world, whether you shall abstain from it. The people of the world are as inadequate judges of Christian morality, as they are of Christian principles; both the one and the other are "foolishness to the natural man." Of all the sublimer precepts, whether evangelical or moral, they are ready to say, "This is a hard saying, who can accept it?"

But let no true Christian "consult with flesh and blood." Let him rather say with David, "Away from me you wicked ones; I will keep the commandments of my God."

Does God call you to "live no longer to yourselves, but unto him?" Does the Lord Jesus Christ bid you to "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach;" and readily to "lay down your lives for his sake?" Let "not these commandments be grievous in your eyes;" but rather "rejoice if you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake."

If at any time you are urged to turn aside from the path of duty, do not let the maxims or habits of the world bias you one moment; you are "not to follow a multitude to do evil!"

If a thing is Scripturally right—then you should love it and cleave to it, though the whole world should be against you; just as Noah, Daniel, and Elijah did. In the same way, if a thing is evil—then you must not do it, though the loss of all things, yes even of life itself, should await you for your integrity. It would have been better far to go into a fiery furnace for your steadfastness, than to save yourselves by an undue compliance.

Doubtless this holy walk and conversation will involve you in the charge of singularity; but whose fault is it, if this conduct makes you singular? Is it yours? Is it not rather theirs, who will not yield obedience to the precepts of their God? We do not mean by this, to justify any who would affect a needless singularity. Far from it; it is only where the people of the world are sinful, that we would recommend any believer to separate from them. But wherever they are sinful, there you must "Stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong," and show them by your example a more perfect way.

In important matters, the whole universe should not shake your resolution. Where duty evidently calls, you must be firm and "faithful unto death." It is confessedly "a strait and narrow way" in which you are called to walk; and, while walking in it, you must of necessity, like Noah, "condemn those" who are walking in "the broad road that leads to destruction, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7)." And consequently, like Jesus, you must incur the scorn and hatred of an ungodly world. But it is better far to brave the hatred of the ungodly, than to participate in the lot that shortly awaits them!

To all, then, who would "adorn the doctrine of our Savior," we beg permission to offer this plain and beneficial direction:

"Let your light shine before men;" and let it shine so bright, as to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and to make those ashamed, who falsely accuse your holy conduct in Christ. Labor habitually to do this in everything that relates either to God or man. Let your enemies, if possible, "have no evil thing to say of you;" nothing to lay hold of; nothing that shall give occasion for that malignant triumph: "There! there! so would we have it."

Be jealous for the honor of Christ and his Gospel. Remember that the world, who are blind enough to each other's faults, will be eagle-eyed in discerning your faults; while they will make allowances enough for each other, they will make no allowances for you; and while they impute each other's frailties to the weakness of human nature, they will impute yours to the pious principles you profess. Be careful then to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you." Watch over your whole temper, and spirit, and life; that "your conduct may be altogether such as befits the Gospel of Christ;" and "let your light be like that of the sun, shining more and more unto the perfect day!"

In a word, "be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing assuredly, that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord!"

#710

THE CHRISTIAN'S CHIEF DESIRES

**[Psalm 119:132-133](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.132-133)**

"Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name. Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me!"

To many, the Psalms are less interesting than most other parts of Scripture, as having in them a less variety of incident whereon to engraft instruction, as also a less measure of plainness in the instruction they convey. But whatever may are lacking in these respects, it is more than compensated by the piety of sentiment and ardor of devotion which pervade them all. If other parts of Scripture add more to our stock of knowledge, the Psalms produces a more elevated tone of feeling, and, if deeply studied, tends in a pre-eminent degree to bring the soul into communion with God, and to prepare it for the enjoyment of the heavenly world.

Let us but get the spirit of the Psalmist in the prayer before us, and we shall have no reason to complain that we were not amused with curious speculations, or edified with matters of deep research.

Our business on the present occasion will be quite simple, namely,

I. To explain the petitions here offered.

Two things the Psalmist here implores of God:

1. The manifestations of his **mercy**.

Mercy is that which every child of Adam needs. He needs it too, not merely for some particular violations of God's law, but for every action of his life. There is iniquity even in his holiest things; his very tears need to be washed, and his repentances to be repented of. Hence he must, from the very beginning to the end of life, and in reference to every moment that he has lived, implore mercy at the hands of the heart-searching God. In this request he sets, as it were, before his eyes all the instances of mercy which God has shown to his most favored people from the foundation of the world.

We may indeed understand his words as a general kind of plea taken from the usual goodness of God to others; and then this petition will accord with that offered in another Psalm, "Remember me with the favor which you bear unto your chosen ones. O visit me with your salvation! [Psalm 106:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.4-5)."

But there seems here a more specific reference to some particular exhibitions of God's mercy in the days of old; multitudes of which must of necessity present themselves to his mind, whenever his attention was directed towards them.

What mercy had God shown to Adam, in promising a Savior to him, instead of inflicting on him the judgments he had so deeply merited!

What mercy to Abel also, in giving him such manifest tokens of his favor!

To Enoch also, in affording him such constant access to him, and in translating him to glory, without ever allowing him to taste the bitterness of death!

In like manner his mercy to Noah, in delivering him from the deluge which overwhelmed the whole world beside.

And to Abraham also, whom he admitted to all the familiarity of a most endeared friend.

These, and many other instances, we may suppose to have been in his mind, when he proposed them to God as patterns of the mercy which he himself desired to partake of.

This is the true way in which every child of God should pray. From all that God has done for his saints in former times, he should take encouragement, and should enlarge his expectations to the utmost extent that the sacred records authorize. God is the same gracious and almighty Being in every age; and what he has done for one he may do for another; and though he may not grant to us precisely the same interpositions as he did to others, he will, as far as our particular occasions may call for them; and we are enemies to ourselves, if we do not open our mouths wide, and ask all that our situation and circumstances can require.

2. The communications of his **grace**.

David desired to be delivered, not from guilt only, but from the power and dominion of sin also. This desire was without reserve; he wished not to retain "any iniquity," however pleasant or profitable, or even justifiable it might be in the eyes of an ungodly world. In this he approved himself sincere and upright; and in this, every true Christian will resemble him.

But in order to this, he begged to be guided altogether by the oracles of truth. The Word of God is the only standard of right and wrong. If we follow any other directory, we shall err. If we adhere to Scripture, we cannot but fulfill the will of God. This is the constant declaration of God himself, verse 9; and it accords with the experience of his people in every age, verse 11. Happy would it be for us, if we would study the Scriptures with this particular view.

We are not disposed to undervalue speculative knowledge; but that which is practical is infinitely to be preferred. The Scriptures are given us as a "light to our paths" in general, and as "a lantern" in every particular case when we know not where to place "our feet." Let us truly seek to be in everything governed by them; and then, though we be mere fools, as it were, in other things, we shall never greatly err, [Psalm 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7). [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8).

From this general view of the petitions, we proceed,

II. To show the instruction to be derived from the Scriptures.

Though not written with a didactic view, they convey much instruction:

1. To Christian **principles**.

The union of the two petitions may properly suggest to us, that a desire for pardon of sin, must invariably be joined with a desire for sanctification also. Were a desire for pardon of sin all that is required to become a Christian, then a Christian would differ but little from those who desire to escape Hell, but have no desire to follow Jesus in a holy life. Sin must be hateful to us, even as it is to God himself, who cannot look upon it without the utmost abhorrence.

Nor is the order in which they stand devoid of good and useful instruction. Mercy is to be sought in the first place. To look for sanctification first, and make that a ground whereon to hope for mercy, would subvert the whole Gospel of Christ! We mean not to say, that we should build such an observation as this on the mere circumstance of the petitions occurring in that particular order; for that circumstance would by no means justify any such conclusion; but from that circumstance we may fitly take occasion to make such an observation which is sanctioned and confirmed by every part of the inspired writings. We cannot too strongly impress it on the minds of all, that in constructing the spiritual edifice, we must ever be careful to distinguish between the foundation and the superstructure, and to assign to each its appropriate place and office.

2. To Christian **practice**.

Here the just improvement of the petitions is clear and obvious; they teach us to be:  
humble Christians,  
practical Christians,  
consistent Christians.  
  
We should be HUMBLE Christians.

The manner in which the petition for mercy is expressed conveys an idea of deep humility. It is as if he had said, "Lord, I am unworthy that you should look upon so base, so vile a creature as I am! Well might my sins provoke you to hide your face from me forever; but O! look upon me, according to the multitude of your tender mercies."

Thus it is that we should ever seek for mercy. It is impossible for us ever to lie too low before our God. To the last hour of our lives we should preserve the spirit of the publican, who, while he sought for mercy, "dared not so much as to lift up his eyes to Heaven, but smote upon his bosom, saying: God be merciful to me a sinner!"

We should also be PRACTICAL Christians.

To think that we are saved by the mercy of God, while we continue to live in sin, is a horrible and a fatal delusion! Do not let anyone entertain such an idea for one moment. Christ's work is finished indeed as it respects himself; but not as it respects us; there is a work to be wrought in us, as well as that which has been wrought for us; and whatever we may imagine about the secret purposes of God, this is revealed as an immutable decree, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord".

To crown the whole, we must be CONSISTENT Christians.

To harbor any sin, of whatever kind it is, proves us to be hypocrites. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will never hear us"—that is, he never accept us. The right hand or right eye must be sacrificed, as well as those sins which may be more easily put away. O let us seek to be "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no deceit," and to be "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ!"

#711

REASONS FOR WEEPING OVER SINNERS

**[Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.136)**

"Rivers of waters run down my eyes, because they do not keep your law!"

The generality, if exhorted to labor for the salvation of others, are ready to reply, "Am I my brother's keeper? [Genesis 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.9)." But those who have truly the fear of God in their hearts will be anxious for the welfare of their fellow-creatures. This concern has at all times distinguished the saints of God, [Jeremiah 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.1); and it was eminently conspicuous in David. Repeatedly in this Psalm does he declare his feelings on this subject, verse 158 and 53; and with peculiar energy in the words before us.

We propose to show on what account we ought to weep for sinners.

I. On account of the **blessings they lose**.

1. There are many **present** blessings which men lose by not keeping God's law.

There is a "peace that passes understanding," and a "joy unspeakable," that attends the believing in Christ, and the devoting of ourselves to his service. The having all one's lusts in subjection, must contribute much to serenity of mind; but the enjoying of God's favor, and the light of his countenance, is a source of the richest happiness that mortals can possess on earth! verse 165. [Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17). [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17)."

But what peace is there to the wicked? [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21).

What can he know of the love of God shed abroad in his heart?

What comfort can he have in the prospect of death and judgment?

2. But the **eternal** blessings which they lose, exceed our highest conceptions.

The obedient believer has "an incorruptible, and undefiled and never-fading inheritance! [1 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4)." There is a crown of righteousness, and a throne of glory, reserved for him in Heaven 2 Timothy 4:8; and he shall spend eternity itself in the immediate presence and fruition of God!

But can we say this respecting the impenitent and unbelieving? No! There is no admission for him into those bright abodes, "the unrighteous cannot inherit that kingdom! [1 Corinthians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9);" "the impure cannot enter there! [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.27)." There shall be "a difference between those who serve God, and those who serve him not, [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18)." The wish that ungodly men feel to be found at last in the place of those whom they now despise, is a proof that they have in their own minds some apprehension of the sentence that awaits them in another world, [Numbers 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.10).

3. And are not these things matters of just lamentation?

It is much to be regretted that men will "feed on ashes, [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)," and seek to "fill their belly with the east wind, [Job 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.2)," when they might "eat the bread of life," and "delight their souls with marrow and fatness! [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2)." And still more must we pity him, who, when there is a rest prepared, and a supper spread in Heaven, has provoked God to swear, that he shall never enter into that rest, [Hebrews 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.18), nor ever partake of that supper, [Luke 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.24).

But there is yet greater reason to weep,

II. On account of **the miseries they bring upon themselves**.

Not to mention the misery of a guilty conscience, which in many instances is so great as to render life itself a burden.

1. How inexpressibly dreadful are the judgments which the wicked will endure in Hell!

However men may labor to disprove it, Hell must be the portion of all who forget God, [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17). And who can form any adequate conception of the torments that shall be there endured? To spend an eternity in such a furnace as that which Nebuchadnezzar kindled for the destruction of the Hebrew youths, would be beyond measure dreadful; but what must it be to lie down in that lake of fire which the breath of the Almighty has kindled! [Isaiah 30:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.33).

2. And can we view sinners hastening to that place of torment, and not weep over them?

Our blessed Lord wept over Jerusalem on account of the temporal calamities that should come upon it; and shall not we weep over the eternal miseries which men are bringing on themselves? Must not our hearts be harder than adamant, if they do not melt into tears at such a sight? Can we weep at the recital of a story we know to be fictitious, and not mourn over such solemn realities?

There is, however—yet greater reason to weep:

III. On account of **the aggravated guilt under which they perish**.

2. It will be more tolerable for Devils and heathen at the day of judgment, than those who perish under the light of the Gospel!

The devils may say: Had the Son of God taken our nature, and died for our redemption, we would gladly have availed ourselves of such a provision for our safety; we never would have despised one that had been sent from Heaven to redeem us.

The heathen may say, Though there was a Savior given—yet we were never privileged to hear his gospel; had his mercy been ever offered to us, we would "long ago have repented in dust and ashes! [Matthew 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.21)."

But what will ungodly professing Christians say before God? Will they say that they had not a Savior? Or that his Gospel was not proclaimed to them?

No! You know there is a Savior who shed his blood to redeem sinners; who has been offered to you, times without number—a full and free salvation. Your mouths therefore must be forever shut! [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12).

"But I say unto you: It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you! [Matthew 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.22)."

What additional reason does this give for weeping over the ungodly!

Every offer of salvation greatly aggravates the guilt of those who reject it; and every increase of guilt will be followed by a proportionable increase of misery! How lamentable then is it, when that very gospel which should have been a savor of life unto life, is made, through the obstinacy of man, a savor of death unto death? [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.15-16). How truly lamentable when Christ himself becomes an occasion of greater damnation to the very people whom he died to save! Alas! that men should ever so despise their own mercies! O that "rivers of tears might run down our eyes!"

INFERENCES.

1. How little true love is there in the world!

However strong and numerous the instances of men's carnal attachment are, there are few indeed who manifest any regard for the souls of their fellow-creatures. Instead of weeping for others, the generality would laugh at those who wept for themselves. But, if we have not this mark on our forehead, we are destined to feel the stroke of God's avenging rod! [Ezekiel 9:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.4-6).

2. How earnest ought ministers to be in dealing with the souls of men!

If all ought to weep for the ungodly, much more should ministers, who are sent to call them to repentance, "warn them night and day with tears! [Acts 20:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.31)." Forgive then the earnestness; we should rather say, the lack of earnestness, of him who labors among you; and pray, that he may so "declare the whole counsel of God," as to be pure from the blood of all men!"

3. How earnest ought men to be in seeking the salvation of their own souls!

If it is the duty of others to weep for us, how much more should we weep for ourselves! Let us then lay to heart the state of our souls, and sow in tears that we may reap in joy! [Psalm 126:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5)."

#712

DAVID'S DESIRE TO SERVE GOD

**[Psalm 119:145-148](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.145-148)**

"I cry with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees. I cry out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises!"

In reading the Psalms of David, we are of necessity led to contemplate the constant spirituality of his mind, and the extraordinary fervor of his devotions; but we are apt to overlook, or to notice only superficially, one of the most lovely features in his character, namely, his ardent desire to fulfill the whole will of God. If we were to read the Psalm before us in this particular view, we would be surprised, that we had not been more forcibly struck with this sentiment before.

He begins the Psalm by declaring those people pre-eminently blessed, who are most distinguished by their obedience to the laws of God, verses 1, 2. In this way alone had he any hope of avoiding shame and disappointment in the last day, verse 6; and therefore he prayed with all imaginable earnestness, that he might be kept from ever deviating from the path of duty, verse 10, 19, 20, and be enabled to "run the way of God's commandments with an enlarged heart, verse 32."

The words which we have just read do not, on a superficial view, convey this idea very strongly to our minds; but on a closer inspection of them, we shall see, that a desire to serve and honor God was the primary object in his petitions, and that even salvation itself was chiefly sought by him on account of the sanctifying and transforming efficacy with which it would be accompanied. Bearing this in mind, we will notice,

I. The object of David's desires.

There is no reason to suppose that David alludes to any particular distress or difficulty in these petitions; he seems rather to refer to the whole work of grace and salvation, which he wished to have forwarded in his soul; and he does not merely engage to make a practical improvement of the grace that shall be given to him, but rather expresses the satisfaction he felt in looking forward to its effects.

Had he merely prayed to God for the salvation of his soul, we would not have disapproved his petitions; because it is proper and necessary for every man to seek above all things the salvation of his soul. But the having such respect to a holy life, and the desiring of salvation itself chiefly in reference to that, is a higher style of piety; as we propose more distinctly under this head to show.

1. It argues a nobler disposition.

A desire after salvation does not of necessity imply any genuine love to God. A slave may wish to escape the lash of his master, and yet have no delight in his service; and we also may seek deliverance from condemnation, without any sincere feelings towards God. Simon Magus desired the intercessions of Peter and John in his behalf; but he was actuated by no better motive than a fear of the judgments denounced against him, [Acts 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.24). But when a person desires to attain the Divine image, and makes the glorifying of God by a holy conduct, the main object of his pursuit, he shows a nobility of mind, and an enlargement of heart, which none but God can bestow. A man by the mere force of natural selfishness may long for pardon; but no man without supernatural grace, can pant after real holiness!

2. It shows juster views of the nature and source of true happiness.

If a man were pardoned, he could not be happy if he were not holy; for sin would ever eat as a canker, and destroy his peace. Even Heaven itself would be no Heaven to one who did not possess heavenly dispositions; for what communion could he have with the glorified saints and angels, all of whom are as holy as God is holy, and as perfect as God is perfect? The angels are represented as ever "fulfilling God's will, and hearkening to the voice of his Word," with an ardent desire to follow the very first intimations of the Divine pleasure. The saints also "rest not day nor night, singing" with all their powers the praises of their most adorable Redeemer.

But how would such an occupation suit those who have no preparation of heart for it? But a disposition to execute the will of God will make a person happy in every situation. If he be bereft of all outward comforts, he will "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience;" so that the person who desires holiness in the first place, proves that his judgment is well informed; and that he justly appreciates that important saying, "The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever."

3. It most corresponds with the ends which the Governor of the universe proposes to himself in all his dispensations.

God, in creating all things, formed them for his own glory; as it is said, "For your glory they are, and were created." In all the works of his providence also he has designed to bind men to himself in a way of uniform and unreserved obedience. This was especially his end in all that he did for the Israelites in the wilderness; he did it, "that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws, [Psalm 105:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.45)." In the great work of redemption he had the same blessed object in view, namely, "that we might serve him without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of our life, [Luke 1:74-75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.74-75)." "This people have I formed for myself, that they may show forth my praise." Now in desiring salvation for holiness sake, and in praying for deliverance from all the bonds of sin, in order to "run with more enlarged hearts the way of God's commands," we forward the everlasting counsels of God, and prove ourselves, in the most important of all concerns, to be like-minded with God.

The worthiness of his object was justly marked by,

II. The ardor of David's pursuit.

This blessed object he sought,

1. In fervent and continual **prayer**.

Observe his own account, "I cry, I cry, I cry." I cry "with my heart," with "my whole heart." What can we conceive more expressive than such language as this? Yet we are sure he did not exaggerate, or state anything that was not strictly true. Moreover, so ardent was his mind in these holy exercises, and so great his delight in them, that he rose often while it was yet dark, in order to pour out his soul before God.

Now this shows us how the renovation and salvation of the soul should be sought by every man. It should occupy our whole mind; it should engage our whole soul. To seek it in a lukewarm and listless way, is to show that we have no just value for our souls, and no real delight in God. Examine, we beseech you, beloved brethren, how it is with you in this respect; for you may as surely know by this the state of your souls before God, as if you were to look into the very book of God's remembrance.

You must distinguish also carefully between the exertions that are made in your own strength, and the efforts which are made in prayer to obtain help from God. It is from these that you must judge of your self-knowledge, and humility, and dependence upon God; for in proportion only as you feel your own weakness, and his readiness to aid you, will your application to him be such as David's was.

2. In a believing dependence on **God's Word**.

The Word of God meditated on, and applied to the soul by faith, is the great support and encouragement of all who desire mercy at God's hands, "My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises."

Thus it should be with us also. O then let me ask: Is the blessed Word of God the one rule of your desires, and the one ground of your expectations? And in this view, is it your meditation day and night?

Here again you may obtain an insight into the state of your souls, and learn to estimate with precision your spiritual attainments. You may, as bible students, be extremely diligent, consuming the midnight oil, and laboring all the day, without being at all nearer to God than those who never look into the sacred records. The question is, Whether you lay hold of it as a word of promise from God to you, and whether you plead it day and night before God in prayer?

This will prove you to be Christians indeed; more especially if the promises of grace for your sanctification be as dear to you as the promises of mercy for your pardon and acceptance. This is the habit of mind which God approves, and which will assuredly issue in everlasting salvation.

APPLICATION.

1. How have your minds hitherto been exercised in relation to eternal things?

Have you thus redeemed time, even from your sleep—for the purpose of forwarding with all possible earnestness the welfare of your souls?

2. What are your views and purposes respecting them in future?

Are you procrastinating, and wasting your time in indolent habits or worthless pursuits? O! awake from your slumbers; up, and be doing; and may the Lord be with you!

#713

BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO LOVE GOD'S LAW

**[Psalm 119:165](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.165)**

"Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble."

The force of principle is exceeding great, even where the principle itself is erroneous and vicious, but much more where it is founded upon the unerring Word of God. It produces in our conduct, promptitude, uniformity, decision; and, while it stimulates to action, it supports the mind in case of failure and disappointment.

Now of all principles, that of love to God and to his revealed will is the strongest. We see in the saints of every age what wonders it is able to effect. In the words before us, David informs us what peace it will bring into the soul amidst the heaviest trials, and what stability amidst the greatest difficulties. But for the more full elucidation of his Words, we will consider,

I. The character here described.

"The law of God" generally throughout the Psalms means the whole revealed will of God. It is not to be confined to the moral, or the ceremonial law; it comprehends the Gospel also; it is "the law which should go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;" even, as Paul calls it, "the law of faith."

To "love" this law is a strong expression, importing much more than a mere obedience to it; for we may conceive people to obey it through fear; whereas those who love it, see an excellency in it, and cordially approve of it in all its parts.

1. Genuine believers love God's Word, **as a mirror of truth**.

In this view it is spoken of by an inspired Apostle, [James 1:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.23-25); and it is justly so represented, because it reflects with perfect fidelity every feature of the human heart. It never flatters, nor does it ever distort; but the Word shows to every one who will look into it, precisely what character he bears in the sight of the heart-searching God.

An insincere person does not like it; he turns away from it; he will not come to it, because it presents to his view his own deformities.

But the true Christian loves it on this very account. He desires to know the worst of himself. He sees that it will be to no purpose for him to deceive his own soul; he is assured that God will not form his estimate according to the partial views which he himself may take; and therefore he desires to see himself just as God sees him. True it is, that he never looks into this looking-glass without finding deeper and deeper cause for humiliation; but still he loves it; yes, he loves it on this very account; even as David did, when he said, "Your Word is very pure; therefore your servant loves it."

2. Genuine believers love God's Word, **as a revelation of saving mercy**.

In this view it is particularly delightful to him. The plan of salvation which it unfolds is so grand, so wonderful, so suitable in all its parts, and so sufficient for all his necessities, that he can never sufficiently admire it! It is his meditation, and his song, all the day. The Scripture represents the Gospel as "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined;" and such indeed he finds it to his soul. In comparison with it, and of the knowledge of it, he "counts all things in the universe but dross and dung".

3. Genuine believers love God's Word, **as a rule of life**.

From the moment of his having found the way of salvation by a crucified Redeemer, the one desire of his soul has been to "live to Him who died for us and rose again." "What will you have me to do?" has been his constant inquiry at the throne of grace; and he delights exceedingly in this Word as a sure directory under every situation and circumstance of life. From day to day he reads it with this particular view, that he may know "how to walk and to please God."

He perceives that men are always endeavoring to lower the requisitions of this law; but he strives rather to have his attainments raised to that perfect standard. Not one of all its commandments is regarded by him as grievous. Nothing is grievous, but his own lack of conformity to them. Could he have his heart's desire, it would be to "walk in all things as Christ walked," and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God".

II. The blessedness of those in whom the love of God's Word is found.

This, as might well be expected, is exceeding great. We notice it in two respects:

1. The happiness of their minds.

"Peace," in the Scripture use of the term, is not a mere absence of trouble, but an actual state of very sublime enjoyment. The person "who loves God's law" in the way before described, has, as the very first-fruits of his faith in Christ, a sense of reconciliation with God, "being justified by faith, he has peace with God! God has said to him, both by his Word and Spirit, "Peace, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven!"

Combined with this, he has the testimony of a good conscience. Though he sees nothing in himself but what furnishes him with grounds for humiliation and self-abasement, he cannot be insensible of the change that has been wrought in him; he dares not deny the work of God in his soul. He has the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the testimony of his own spirit, concurring to assure him that "old things have passed away within him, and all things become new;" and though he cannot attain that measure of perfection that he aspires after, he is conscious that, if he could, he would be as "pure as God is pure," and as "perfect as God is perfect." His daily and hourly employment brings in an abundance of peace to his soul. He is engaged in doing what he believes to be the will of God; and he finds by sweet experience the truth of that saying, "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). See also [Psalm 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.11) and [Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17)."

Nor has he less comfort in looking forward to the eternal state. He is not left to be a prey to fears and apprehensions about his future destiny. He knows in whom he has believed, and that his God and Savior is able to keep him unto that great and solemn day. He sees also, that he has in Christ a right and title to the heavenly inheritance; and that, "when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Hence, instead of dreading the approach of death, he looks forward to it as the consummation of all his wishes, and the completion of all his happiness; and "desires to depart, that he may be with Christ."

Such is the peace which it is the privilege of all who love the Gospel to enjoy, and which Christ himself has left them as a most invaluable legacy, saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you;" and truly it is "a peace which surpasses all understanding."

2. The stability of their ways.

Those who have not this divine principle within them, are liable to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, and to be "moved from their steadfastness" by every temptation. But not so the true Christian, in whose heart the law of God is engraved. He, though still assaulted with manifold temptations, is enabled to withstand them all. At the very moment of the assault, he says, with Joseph, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" And throughout the whole course of his life he experiences, on the whole, the truth of that promise, "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)."

If he is tried with the most formidable persecutions, he does not, like the stony-ground hearers, presently desist from following the Lord, but takes up his cross manfully, and makes up his mind to suffer the loss even of life itself, rather than dishonor and deny his Lord. Be his trials ever so numerous, he says concerning them, "None of these things move me, neither do I count my life dear unto me." "I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die, for the Lord's sake."

Perhaps one of the greatest stumbling-blocks which lie in the way of the sincere, is the fall of many who once appeared to run well. These, in their fall, sweep away, as it were with their tail, many, very many, of the stars of Heaven, [Revelation 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.4). But those who truly love God's law are fixed as the sun in the sky! [Psalm 72:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.5). They know that the truth and excellence of religion does not depend on those who profess it; and therefore, whatever be the conduct of others, he determines, through God's assistance, to hold it fast even to the end. Thus does he surmount the obstacles which sin and Satan place in his way; and is finally "made more than a conqueror through Him who loved him!"

ADDRESS.

1. To those who do not possess this character.

It is indeed a great thing to love God's Word. Do not let any imagine, that a general approbation of it is that which will either satisfy God, or bring peace into the soul. We love it not aright, if we do not love it universally, in everything that it requires, and supremely, above all that the world can give or take away.

Nor let anyone who does not thus love it, expect peace to his soul; for God has said that there is no peace unto him, [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21); nor can he have stability, seeing that he is in darkness even until now, [1 John 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.10-11). You must inquire for the good old way, and walk therein, if ever you would taste this inestimable blessing, [Jeremiah 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.16).

2. To those who, while they profess to have attained this character, enjoy not the blessings connected with it.

God's Word is true; nor shall any who trust in it be disappointed of their hope. Hear his sayings, [Psalm 23:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.1-2). [Jeremiah 31:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.9); and, if you do not experience the accomplishment of them in your own souls, know that the fault is in yourselves alone. As sure as ever the character is yours, so most assuredly shall the blessedness also be yours. "He will keep his saints" in peace and holiness, even to the end! [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3). 1 Samuel 2:9.

#714

SECURITY OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD

**[Psalm 121:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 121.1-8)**

"I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in, from this time forth, and even forevermore."

A life of faith is that which alone befits the Christian; but how much is implied in a life of faith is very little considered. The Divine government is too often supposed to extend to great things only; and the idea of referring to God all the little occurrences of every day, is thought by many to be derogatory to his supreme Majesty. But God is to be seen as much in the fall of a sparrow, as in the fall of the greatest empire; and our dependence upon him should extend to everything without exception. Should we attempt to draw a line between the events to which his attention may be supposed to be directed, and those which may be left, as the expression is, to chance, we would find ourselves utterly at a loss, and, in fact, should soon prove ourselves to be downright Atheists.

The Scriptures admit of no such distinction; they ascribe everything to God; even the events which in some respect owe their origin to Satan, in other points of view are traced up to God himself as their author 1 Chronicles 21:1 with [2 Samuel 24:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.1); and one very important use of the Psalms is to show us how much the habit of referring everything to God characterizes, composes, and elevates the Christian mind.

In the Psalm before us we see this truth exemplified in the experience of David; in illustrating which, we shall notice,

I. The **resolution** which David formed.

The first verse of the Psalm represents the Psalmist as expressing his conviction of the utter insufficiency of all earthly powers to assist him, and his determination to confide in God alone. And in this view the passage exactly accords with that declaration of the Church in the prophet Jeremiah, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel! [Jeremiah 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.23)."

But as it stands in our translation, it is a resolution of David to look unto Jehovah, who dwells on Mount Zion, or rather in the highest heavens, and to trust in him as the one only source of all good.

1. This was a **wise** resolution.

When our Lord said to his disciples, "Will you also go away?" Peter replied in the name of all, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." In like manner we must ask: To whom can we go for help, except to the Lord our God? No creature can afford us any effectual aid. The creation itself exists only through the continued agency of Him who first called it into existence, and in all its parts needs the same superintending care that we ourselves do. Wherever we turn our eyes for help, every creature uniformly replies, "It is not in me; neither in me." To look therefore to Jehovah, is our truest, our only, wisdom!

2. This was a **pious** resolution.

A man duly sensible of his dependence on God, abhors the idea of trusting in an arm of flesh. He would not so dishonor God; he would not so invade his unalienable prerogative. He loves the very thought of being a pensioner on the Divine bounty. The habit of committing every concern to God, and of receiving every blessing from God, is truly delightful to him. Hence he says with the church of old, "Ashur shall not save us; neither will we ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands: You are our gods. For in you the fatherless finds mercy! [Hosea 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.3)." This is the dictate of true piety; and, while it ensures to men a constant communication of all necessary good, it renders every blessing ten-fold more sweet, as coming to them through the special intervention of their heavenly Father.

3. This was a **necessary** resolution.

This state of mind is equally necessary for every man. The greatest monarch is as dependent upon God as the basest person in the universe. No man has any power to secure himself for one single moment. "He is crushed before the moth"—if God gives it a commission to destroy him. Pharaoh himself was as open to the assault of all the different plagues, and as incapable of removing any one of them, as any of his subjects were.

What peace then can any man enjoy, who has no other than a created arm to rest upon? If we would have any solid comfort in our minds, we must realize a sense of God's superintending care, and rest in him for a supply of every blessing that we stand in need of.

Having declared his resolution, the Psalmist informs us of,

II. The **encouragement** given to David to persevere in his resolution.

It is worthy of observation, that after the two first verses of the Psalm, David ceases to speak, and is himself addressed by another, who overheard his resolution. And who is it that thus replies to him? It is no other than God himself; who immediately replies, in order to show to the whole universe how pleasing and acceptable to him such a resolution is. Nor are such transitions unusual in the Scriptures; but they deserve especial notice, wherever they occur.

We may see a precisely similar passage in the book of the prophet Jeremiah; where the Lord, having overheard the confessions of his repenting people, instantly takes up the subject, and for their encouragement addresses them in these gracious terms, "If you will return, O Israel, says the Lord, return unto me; and I will put your abominations out of my sight; and you shall not be moved! [Jeremiah 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.25); [Jeremiah 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 4.1)." The declarations which God here made to David, are equally applicable to all, who, like him, are resolved to live in a state of dependence upon God.

1. Let us consider David's encouragements, in relation to **temporal** things.

All the different expressions which are here used, have an evident reference to what was wrought for Israel during the forty years of their sojourning in the wilderness.

The roughness of their untrodden path would often occasion "their feet to slip."

The heat of the sun by day, and the influence of the moon, together with the noxious damps, by night, would greatly molest them in their journey.

Their danger from savage beasts or venomous reptiles would tend to keep them in continual alarm.

But God promises that no evil shall hurt those who trust in him.

He will be to them an ever-watchful helper. Men, be they ever so numerous, may be off their guard; but the Keeper of Israel never will.

He never slumbers nor sleeps.

No enemy can escape his notice.

No device be hidden from his view.

His express engagement to his people is, that "no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17)."

He will be to them also an ever-present helper. The idea of his being "our shade upon our right hand" is exceedingly beautiful; for none but those in hot climates can fully conceive the benefit of a shade to protect them from the intense heat of the sun, which often kills people. But the expression of being our shade upon our right hand probably alludes to the situation of the cloud which attended the Israelites through the wilderness, not only to guide them in their journey, but to shade them by day, and to give them light and warmth also by night. And, as the journey of the Israelites was chiefly in a north-east direction, the cloud which afforded them this shade would be on their right hand during the whole of the day.

But to expand on this, the import of the expression obviously is, that, wherever we are open to the assaults of an enemy, God will be ever-present to afford us his protection; and that whether we be going out or coming in, we may be assured of his continued and effectual care.

He will yet further be an all-sufficient helper. Neither sun nor moon, (which may represent the greatest of created powers,) nor indeed any other being shall hurt us; for "He will preserve us from all evil," and that, not for a season only, but "from this time forth, and even for evermore."

To the same effect this truth is largely declared in the book of Job, in reference to every species of calamity, that it shall not befall anyone who trusts in God, or, if it befalls him, it shall be overruled for his more abundant good! [Job 5:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19-23).

We must surely take the promise in this latitude; else it would be contrary to fact and experience; but understood with this limitation, it is, and ever shall be, accomplished in every child of God, [Isaiah 27:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.3).

2. Let us consider David's encouragements in relation to the concerns of the **soul**.

It is expressly asserted here, that God will "preserve our souls." We may be assured therefore, that whatever he does for the body that perishes, shall much more be done for our immortal part. Yes, "he will keep the feet of his saints," nor shall all the powers, whether of earth or Hell, be able to cast them down! "Never will he leave us; never, never will he ever forsake us!" Our enemies, it is true, will fight against us to the uttermost; but he will allow none of them ever to "pluck us out of his hand."

To this extent Paul avows his confidence in God, [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39) with 2 Timothy 2:18; and every believer may justly assure himself, that "nothing in Heaven, earth, or Hell, shall ever separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

ADDRESS.

1. To those who have no fears.

Whence does this proceed? If from confidence in the power and veracity of God, it is well; you are then entitled to cast off all fear; for those who fear Him, have nothing else to fear.

But if your lack of fear arises, as it too generally does, from an ignorance of your danger, or a confidence in yourselves, you have no reason for self-commendation; since the greater your imagined security is, the more imminent and awful is your danger!

Would you be afraid if you were surrounded by armed hosts that were seeking to destroy you? And will you not be afraid, when Satan himself, that roaring lion, is going about day and night seeking the everlasting destruction of your sou? To continue ignorant of your danger is the readiest way to ensure your everlasting ruin.

What if some alarm be occasioned by a sight of your danger? Is it not better to dread the pursuer of blood, than to fall into his hands! Will not your security when you have gained the city of refuge, compensate for the terror that drove you there?

Know then, that if you are yet strangers to a beneficial fear, you have yet to learn the true import of a scriptural and saving hope.

2. To those true believers who are too much under the influence of fear.

You should never forget what an Almighty Friend you have. How many times in this Psalm are you reminded, that the Lord, even the Almighty God, is your helper and deliverer! Were he less powerful, or less vigilant, or less worthy of belief—then you might well fear. But what ground can he have for fear, who has God himself for his refuge!

O! learn to say with David, "The Lord is my strength and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid!" I ask not from whence your dangers or your fears arise; for, if they were a thousand times greater and better founded than they are, this one answer were sufficient to remove them all, "If God is for you—then who can be effectually against you?" Only rely on God, and you are safe. See how tenderly he chides your unbelieving fears, [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-31). If under any circumstances you are tempted to indulge an unbelieving fear, check yourselves instantly, as David did; and say with him, "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)."

#715

THANKSGIVING FOR GREAT DELIVERANCE

[Written in October 1801, after the peace agreement between France (Napoleon) and England.]

**[Psalm 124:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 124.1-8)**

"If the LORD had not been on our side, let Israel say--if the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away. Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and earth."

The Psalmist, after some great deliverance either from foreign enemies or civil insurrection, records, for the instruction and encouragement of the Church in all ages, the goodness of God towards him. The precise occasion on which it was penned, is not known. Instead therefore of dwelling on historical events, which, as applied to the Psalm, must be at best conjectural—we shall take occasion from the Psalm to set before you, in reference to the solemnities of this day,

I. Matter for devout acknowledgment.

To illustrate this, two things are to be considered:

1. Our **danger**, which, like that alluded to in the Psalm itself, has been imminent. The number of our enemies (like a flood, verse 4, 5.) their inveteracy against us (verse 3.) and the combination of circumstances at the time of the mutiny in the fleet, well illustrate this. Irresistible, what if God had not been so decidedly for us (mark the repetition, verses 1, 2.) in some of our naval engagements? If only half of our victories had terminated as much in favor of the enemy, how different would have been our state, especially when all Europe was combined against us! tremendously torn in pieces (verse 6.) and swallowed up (verse 3-5.).

2. Our **deliverance**, which, like that which is here celebrated, has been sudden. Our escape is indeed like that of a bird that gets out after having been already caught in the fowler's net, verse 7; and effectual. Peace is established; and the snare itself (the principles which occasioned the war) is broken, verse 7.

II. Our duty arising from God's deliverance of us.

This is comprised in two things:

1. Gratitude. The language of all our hearts should be, "Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped! verses 6 and 7"

2. Trust. We should in all future difficulties hope and trust in God as our almighty Protector! "Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and earth! verse 8.

APPLICATION.

However thankful we may be for our national mercies, we must not forget that there is yet more abundant cause for joy on account of our deliverance from sin and Satan, death and Hell, through the mediation and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Let the greatness of our danger, and the perfection of our deliverance, be the subject of our daily contemplations, that we may trust in Jesus with our whole hearts, and praise him with our whole souls!

#716

GOD TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN OUR MERCIES

**[Psalm 124:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 124.1-8)**

"If the LORD had not been on our side, let Israel say--if the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away. Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and earth."

On what occasion this Psalm was written, we are not informed; but in the title it is ascribed to David; and no period in his history suits it better than the time of Absalom's rebellion, when, but for God's interposition, in defeating the counsel of Ahithophel, the banished monarch and his adherents must all have perished.

But as there is no period fixed, it will be needless to enter into a consideration of any circumstances as connected with the Psalm, since all that we should say could rest on no better foundation than conjecture.

Of course, if we apply the Psalm to the circumstances of our own nation at the present time, October 1814, we shall not be understood as intimating that there was any such reference intended by the Psalmist, but merely as accommodating the general expressions of it to our own particular case; and truly we must say, that if they had originally been penned for the occasion, they could not be more suited to it than they are.

Two things then we would lead you to consider:

I. The great deliverances which we are now met to celebrate.

During this long and bloody war, several occasions have arisen wherein we have experienced the most signal deliverance. We will call your attention to a few; we have been saved, almost by miracle, from:

1. The revolutionary principles.

In our own nation, as well as on the continent, there was a general outcry about liberty and equality! Multitudes in every rank of life united their efforts to overthrow the Constitution of this country, and to establish a democracy in the land. Even pious people in vast numbers were carried away by the delusive idea of ameliorating the condition of the lower classes of society, and lent their aid to others who aimed at nothing less than the utter subversion of the Government.

But through the energy of our king, and of those who administered his government, God in his infinite mercy preserved us; and we have lived to see the day when almost all who were so deluded have seen their error, and been led to regard the constitution of this country as the most perfect of any upon earth.

2. The mutiny of the fleet.

Time was, when the dissatisfaction so industriously cherished and diffused by traitors within our own bosom, and spread, by means of corresponding committees, over the whole land, had reached even that class of men who in all former ages had been the boast and glory of their country, the sailors in our fleet. Many of these broke forth into open mutiny, and threatened to carry out ships, which were the bulwark of the nation, to the ports of our enemies.

Such a blow as that would have destroyed us utterly; but the same kind Providence which had watched over us on so many other occasions, interposed to rescue us from the impending calamity, and to restore among our fleet that union and energy which have rendered it triumphant in every quarter of the globe.

3. The threatened invasion.

What immense preparations were made by our enemies to invade us, and what little preparation there was on our part to oppose them, cannot have escaped from our remembrance. True it is, that we were powerful by sea; and that consideration it was which kept the enemy in check; but had not their forces been called off to other encounters, there can be no doubt but that they would have attempted to invade us; and, if they had succeeded in landing only two thirds of the forces which they might have brought against us, there can be no doubt but that they would have seized and plundered the metropolis, and spread desolation and misery over the whole country. We all know what destruction they threatened us with; and, could they have once overrun our country, they would have reduced us to such a state of subjection as Israel experienced, when the Philistines suffered them not even to retain a workman in their land, who would be able to fabricate arms for their defense. Not a dock, or a naval architect, would have been left in our land.

4. The overthrow of the Russian empire.

Already had the whole of Europe been combined against us, and we were constrained to array ourselves against their united force. But the insatiable ambition of our great enemy raised up opposition at last from among his own allies, and gave us an opportunity of engaging him in a foreign land, instead of having to contend with him on our own soil. Still however we must have fallen before him, had not his insupportable despotism goaded to resistance the Russian monarch. But at one time, even that event also appeared to have prepared for us a more complete destruction. But God suffered the proud oppressor madly to protract his stay among the ruins of Moscow, until a retreat became extremely difficult.

Hence arose defeat; the severity of the climate, and the extraordinary energy of the Russian armies, soon dissipated the forces of our enemy; and enabled many who had been compelled to fight under his banners, to turn their arms against him, and to seek the recovery of their former independence.

Yet, after all, if the last great battle had not been decided in favor of the allied armies, our enemy might still have retrieved his former losses, and again forged chains for the whole civilized world.

But the time was come for God to have mercy on us; and he has had mercy beyond all that could possibly have been expected; he has trodden down the oppressor, as the mire in the streets; and has restored peace among all the contending nations, even such a peace as the world never saw before; a peace cemented by universal harmony and love.

Let us then, instead of contemplating our mercies only, proceed to consider,

II. The duty of acknowledging God in our national mercies.

In the Psalm before us, all the success is ascribed to God alone; God's gracious agency is acknowledged to have been the sole cause of Israel's preservation verses 1, 2; for this his name is humbly and gratefully adored, verse 6; and he is declared to be henceforth the only hope of his people, verse 8. In like manner should we acknowledge him in all the mercies which we now celebrate; for,

1. All of our mercies really proceed from God.

We are by no means disposed to withhold our tribute of praise from those who have been the instruments of our deliverance. Those who have been at the helm of our affairs have certainly laid their plans with consummate wisdom; and our forces both by sea and land have carried them into execution with extraordinary energy. But still, without the Divine blessing their united efforts, however great, would have failed. It is God alone who inspired them either with wisdom or courage; and he alone who gave success to their endeavors. We are assured that even the ploughman and the thresher derive all their skill from him, [Isaiah 28:24-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.24-29); how much more then the governors of nations, and the conductors of fleets and armies!

The victories of Cyrus were, as much as any could be, the result of human energy; because God was not known either to him or to his people; but God tells us, that he, even he alone, gave him success, [Isaiah 45:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.1-7). In like manner it is God, and he alone, who has conducted us in safety through all our troubles, and brought them at last to such a happy outcome.

That we should see and acknowledge this, is of infinite importance; because God is "a jealous God, who will not give his glory to another," or endure that we should "burn incense to our own net." Hear with what earnestness he cautioned the Jews against this great impiety, [Deuteronomy 8:11-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.11-17); and let us learn with all possibly care to avoid it; let us bear in mind that it is God alone "who makes wars to cease, and breaks the bow, and cuts the spear in sunder, and burns the chariot in the fire, [Psalm 46:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.9-10);" and that, as there is no evil, so neither is there good, in the city, which is not the work of his hands! [Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.6).

2. The acknowledging of God in all of our mercies gives us the truest enjoyment of them.

Others may indulge in carnal mirth; but their joy will expire "as the crackling of thorns under a pot;" and no solid benefit will accrue to their souls.

But if we view God in our mercies, they will lead our affections heavenward; they will tend to abase us in the dust for our own unworthiness, and to magnify in our estimation the goodness of God, who has done such great things for us.

Compare these feelings with those which the ungodly experience on such occasions; how pure, how elevating, how abiding! We may see the conduct of the ungodly strikingly exemplified by the Amalekites after they had invaded and plundered Ziklag, "they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating, and drinking, and dancing, because of the great spoil that they had taken! [1 Samuel 30:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.16)." On the other hand, we may behold in Israel the conduct of the godly, singing praises unto God, and glorifying him for all the wonders he had wrought for them at the Red Sea, "Who is like unto you, O Lord, among the gods? who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. See [Exodus 15:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.1-11)." Can we doubt which of the two had the richer enjoyment of their prosperity?

Let us then imitate the pious Israelites; yes, let us contemplate, like David, every occurrence whereby God has manifested his care over us; and let us, in reference to every one of them, say, "His mercy endures forever; his mercy endures forever! Psalms 136."

3. A view of God in these his **providential** mercies will encourage us to apply to him for the blessings of his **grace**.

As great as the dangers were from which Israel had been delivered by the interpositions of their God, they were not a whit greater than those to which we are exposed every day and hour. Truly we have a sea of difficulties ready to overwhelm us; we have a roaring lion seeking to devour us; and a subtle enemy ready to take us in his snares. And who, but God, can deliver us? Who can hope to escape from such great perils, if God himself be not on his side? Truly, "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made Heaven and earth," and in his name alone!

Where is there one of us, who, when he considers the number and power of his spiritual enemies, has not reason to say, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not given me as a prey to their teeth?" Sure we are, that there is not a believer among us, who does not view himself as "a brand plucked out of the burning," and marvel at the grace that has been magnified towards him in the redemption of his soul.

Now then let those who have not yet experienced this mercy, consider how gracious God has been to our guilty land, and what an amazing deliverance he has given to us; and let them say within themselves, "Will God be less gracious to my soul?" Has he not assured me, that "he will cast out none who come to him in the name of Jesus;" and that, if I make my requests known to him, he will fill me with "a peace that passes all understanding?"

O let us put this matter to a trial; let us see whether or not he is "rich in mercy unto all who call upon him."

Beloved brethren, the time is short; there are yet but a few more months or years, perhaps but a few more days or hours, before the day of salvation will be closed. We would earnestly wish, that, at the moment of your departure hence, you should be able to look back on all the dangers you have escaped, and with triumphant exultation adopt the language of the Psalm before us.

Certainly, as many of us as shall be saved at last, will instantly, on their entrance into the eternal world, begin the song of the redeemed, and sing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb forever and ever!" Now then seek to have the Lord on your side.

Beg him to strengthen you against all the evils of your own hearts.

Beg him to rescue you from the impending storms of a tumultuous world.

Beg him to deliver you from all the deceit and violence of your great adversary.

So shall you have peace with God in your own conscience; and in due season enter into that rest, where neither sin nor sorrow shall ever more assault you

[The author was not aware that he had written on this subject before. But us the former Skeleton consists of only a single page, and this goes over such different ground, particularly in showing how to improve national mercies, he has thought it not improper to print this also.]

#717

TRUST IN THE LORD

**[Psalm 125:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1-2)**

"Those who trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even forever."

In forming our estimate of men, we are apt to look at their actions only; and even our own characters also, we try by that same standard. But it is the habit of the mind that chiefly marks the man; and by that we shall be estimated at the tribunal of our God.

Doubtless, actions are important, as indicative of principles from whence they flow; and by them, we, who can only see the external fruits, are constrained to judge of the quality of the root from whence they proceed.

But the heart-searching God looks at the root itself; and approves or disapproves of men according to the real quality and habit of their minds.

In reading the words before us, we might estimate at a low rate the character here designated, did we not analyze the terms by which that character is described. But, if we take sufficient pains to explore the import of the words, and the true nature of the grace which they delineate, we shall see that the person "who trusts in the Lord" is a very exalted character, and that the blessedness here accorded to him is precisely such as befits a holy God to confer upon him.

Let us consider:

I. The character here described.

"Trust in the Lord" does not import a mere general acknowledgment of God as the Governor of the universe. It implies incomparably more, even a deep conviction of His special providence, and of His incessant attention to that person's every minutest concern. It implies, I say, this conviction:

1. In our **views**.

Let it be considered what trust is. It of necessity imports some engagement on the part of him in whom that trust is reposed. Consequently, a general notion of God's ordering all things according to the counsel of his own will, however deep that conviction is, will not amount to the grace that is here described. The devils possess that conviction, in its utmost possible extent; but they cannot trust in God, because they have no promise given to them, nor any ground whatever to hope that he will ever interpose in their favor. The person who trusts in the Lord must see him as a Covenant-God in Christ Jesus, engaged to accomplish for his chosen people all that their necessities can require!

2. In our **habits**.

With such views of God, must be united a total renunciation of every other hope, and a committing of all our concerns to him, for body and for soul, for time and for eternity. There must be a going forth of the soul to him in prayer; a spreading of our needs before him; and a declared trust in his great and precious promises. Viewing him as both a God of providence and of grace, we must fully expect his attention to our every request, to order everything for our good, and to save us in Christ Jesus with an everlasting salvation.

Our expectations must be co-extensive with his engagements; and, as he has engaged to "be a God unto us," we must expect from him all that . . .  
unerring wisdom,  
unbounded power,  
unsearchable love,  
and unchanging faithfulness,  
can effect!

This is, in fact, what the Apostle elsewhere calls "a life of faith in the Son of God;" and nothing short of this will answer the character in my text. But, wherever this is, there shall also be,

II. The privileges connected with sincere trust in God.

1. There shall be **Stability**.

Mount Zion was a place of so much strength, that, from the days of Joshua to the time of David, the Israelites could never take it. They occupied Jerusalem; but Mount Zion was too strong for them; insomuch that the Jebusites who inhabited it laughed them to scorn, vaunting that if there were none left but blind and lame to defend the fortress, the Jews would never be able to prevail against it, [2 Samuel 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.6-8).

But far more impregnable is the fortress in which they dwell who trust in the Lord, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs to it, and is safe! [Proverbs 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.10)." They may be assaulted both by men and devils; but they are assured, that "God will keep them by his own power, through faith, unto everlasting salvation, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)." They are in the Savior's hands; and he has pledged himself that "none shall ever pluck them out of his hands! [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)."

In themselves they remain weak as ever, as both David and Peter have clearly shown; but in Christ they are strong; and in the Covenant which is made with them in Christ, and "which is ordered in all things and sure," it is engaged, on the part of God, that they shall never be moved, and that "the gates of Hell shall never prevail against them! [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18)."

2. There shall be **Protection**.

The hills that were round about Jerusalem protected it on every side; so that the Romans, it was confessed, would not have been able to subdue it, if the garrison themselves had not madly assisted them by their mutual contentions.

But far more effectually does the Lord protect his people, being to them "a wall of fire round about them [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5);" a wall which will not only ward off the assaults of their enemies, but will itself destroy their assailants. In fact, "he protects them even as the apple of his eye! [Deuteronomy 32:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.10);" and "sooner shall the ordinances of Heaven and earth pass away, and the foundations of the world be searched out," than anyone of them shall be left to perish, [Jeremiah 31:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.35-37) and [Isaiah 54:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.9-10). To assure them of this, "he has confirmed his covenant with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have strong consolation, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)," and live "assured that nothing shall ever separate them from his love [Romans 8:34-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34-39)."

To all of you, then, I say,

1. Get just views of your God and Savior.

Do not be satisfied with a general acknowledgment of him; but study his nature as revealed in the inspired volume, and acquaint yourselves with his dispensations as exhibited in the sacred records. See him delivering his people Israel out of Egypt, and supporting them in the wilderness, and establishing them in the land of Canaan; and then rest assured, that he is the same God, alike powerful, alike gracious, and alike faithful to all his engagements.

2. Let your expectations from him be to the utmost extent of your necessities.

There should be no limit to them, provided only they do not contradict the Lord's will, or tend to the subversion of his glory. "However wide you open your mouth, he will fill it;" and however "large your desires be, he will fulfill them! [Psalm 145:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.19)." Listen not, under any circumstances, to flesh and blood, like Asa, who in his sickness sought to the physicians; but even though sense should stand in direct opposition to faith, as in Abraham's call to sacrifice his son Isaac, "be strong in faith, giving glory to your God, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)." Your divine Master, who has engaged himself for you, would have you to "be without worry." His command is, "Do not worry about anything; but in everything by prayer and supplication 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! [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7)." Only "cast your care thus on him," and you will soon know, by sweet experience, the force of that appeal which David made to the all-seeing God, "O Lord God Almighty, blessed is the man that trusts in you! [Psalm 84:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.12)."

#718

THE UPRIGHT AND APOSTATES CONTRASTED

**[Psalm 125:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.4-5)**

"Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart. But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers."

At the commencement of this Psalm, the inspired writer speaks of the Lord's people as secured both by the providence and grace of God. And it is further promised, in the verse before my text, that their trials shall not prevail beyond their strength, Compare verse 3 with 1 Corinthians 10:13.

But no exemption from trouble is promised to them. It is taken for granted, that "the rod of the wicked shall fall upon them, though it shall not rest upon them." The wrath of man, like water turned upon a mill, shall come on them with no more force than shall be sufficient for accomplishing God's gracious purposes on their souls. Nevertheless, the trouble shall be sufficient to test every man, and to prove the truth and measure of his integrity; the man who fairly meets and stands the trial, being approved, while he who sinks under it, or shuns it, shall be deemed altogether unworthy of the Divine favor. Hence the Psalmist pours out his fervent intercession in behalf of the upright, and at the same time warns every man of the danger of declension from the ways of God. The two points for our consideration are:

I. David's encouragement to the upright.

His prayer shows what every believing soul may expect at the hands of God.

No one, without constant supplies of grace and strength, would be able to endure the trials with which he will be visited in the path of duty. A man's uprightness may embolden him to ask for divine assistance; but it can never support him without it. The greatest and best of believers are weak, even as others, if for a moment they be left to themselves.

Hezekiah was in some respects as eminent for piety as any of the kings of Israel, [2 Kings 18:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 18.5); but, when "God left him to try him," he fell! [2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.31).

Even Abraham and Isaac showed themselves weak in the day of trial; each of them denying his wife, and Abraham repeatedly, through fear of the consequences which an acknowledgment of the truth might bring upon them.

The Psalmist therefore prays, "Do good unto them, O Lord"—supply every one of them with that measure of strength which their necessities may require; and uphold them under all the circumstances to which they may be reduced!

The prayer contains nothing which God himself has not made the subject of a direct promise.

With all his believing people God has made an everlasting covenant, that "He will not turn away from them to do them good;" yes, "that he will rejoice over them to do them good," and assuredly interest himself in their behalf, "with his whole heart, and with his whole soul, [Jeremiah 32:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40-41)."

God considers his own glory as engaged for his people; and sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one who is truly upright in heart be ever left by him to perish! [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11). The good which he designs them may not be of the precise nature that they desire or expect; (as Paul had not "the thorn in his flesh" removed, but grace was given him to sustain it,) but, that which is really best shall be given unto them; and it shall be imparted to them in the time, and manner, and measure, that unerring wisdom sees to be best for them. Their extremity shall be God's opportunity. See [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11).

With his tender concern for the upright, we see combined,

II. His warning to the unstable.

As for open apostates, no one can doubt their fate, "their last end will be worse than their beginning, [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)." But there are many who secretly decline from God's holy ways, who yet think that, because they turn not back to open profaneness, they shall "escape the judgment of God." Now,

These are the people warned.

"The man who puts his hand to the plough, is not to look back," lest the furrows which he makes disgrace the field, [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62). In the same way, "those who turn aside unto their crooked paths" are people who, by crooked policy and undue compliances, are laboring to avert the evils which a bold and steadfast conduct would bring upon them. Such was the conduct of Peter, when, for the sake of pacifying the Judaizing teachers, he constrained the Gentiles to conform to the Mosaic ritual; and had not the reproof which Paul administered to him, in the presence of the whole Galatian Church, produced the desired change, this temporizing Apostle would have destroyed his own soul, and the souls of all his followers.

In matters of minor importance we may yield, for the sake of peace, as Paul himself did when he became a Nazarite; but in matters which will in any degree impeach our fidelity to God, "we must not give place, no, not for an hour." To benefit others, we may yield; to screen ourselves, we must not yield. Not life itself must be held dear, when an adherence to duty calls for the sacrifice of it.

Those only who are "upright" will have peace at the last.

Those who dissemble with God, and are diverted from the paths of righteousness by that "fear of man which brings a snare," have no real peace in this life, [Isaiah 59:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.8); for there can be no peace where there is not "the testimony of a good conscience." Much less can there be peace in a dying hour, and in the near prospect of giving up our account to God. But, if we suppose a man to have deceived himself so far as to have prevented any remonstrances from his own conscience, still, the very instant that he shall be summoned into the presence of his God, his delusions will be all dispelled, and he will see himself even as God sees him. Where will his peace then be? Alas! it will be fled forever; for in that day none but the true Israel will be approved by their God. All the rest, however subtle may have been their conduct, "will be led forth with the workers of iniquity," and take their portion with the most abandoned of the human race! In fact, the portion of hypocrites is declared to be pre-eminently bitter, [Matthew 24:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.51), because of the light they have resisted, and the dissimulation they have practiced. Let the unstable then know this, and avail themselves of the warning thus given them.

Then let every one see, and be convinced of,

1. The importance of uprightness.

None but the upright in heart can expect any "good" at the hands of God. "As for such people as turn aside unto their crooked ways," "their own wickedness shall correct them, and their backslidings reprove them, [Jeremiah 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.10)." Then alone can we be approved of our God, when our heart is right with God. For "the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath;" and will surely perish under an accumulated weight of misery.

2. The necessity of decision.

It should never admit of one moment's doubt, whom we shall serve. Nothing must be allowed to stand in competition with God's revealed will. Sufferings are to be only as the dust upon the balance. So, also, must gains be counted but loss by us, if we would approve ourselves to God. Let us, then, ever be ready to answer our opponents, as the Apostles did, "Whether it is right to hearken unto you more than unto God—you judge." For we cannot but obey him regardless of the outcome, and execute his will, though every man on earth, and every wicked spirit in Hell, should combine against us. We will, God helping us, be faithful unto death; for then, and then alone, can we have any scriptural hope of obtaining eternal life.

#719

DELIVERANCE FROM SPIRITUAL BONDAGE ACKNOWLEDGED

**[Psalm 126:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.1-4)**

"When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev."

The great body of the Psalms was composed by David; but some were written many hundred years before his time, as the 90th Psalm was by Moses; and other Psalms many hundred years after him, as that before us, which was evidently written after the Babylonish captivity. It relates in the first instance to the delivery of Israel from their sore bondage, and their restoration to their long desolated country; but it is well applicable to that redemption which is given to the souls of men, and which was shadowed forth by that great event.

Let us consider from the passage,

I. The deliverance here celebrated.

Grievous beyond expression was Israel's captivity. They were treated with the utmost cruelty by their Babylonian oppressors, [Psalm 137:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 137.8-9); and their sufferings were greatly heightened by the derision with which their pious lamentations were regarded, [Psalm 137:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 137.3-4). But in proportion to the greatness of their afflictions was their joy at the unexpected deliverance given to them. Observe,

1. The feelings excited by it.

Among the captives themselves the joy was so great, that they scarcely knew whether it was a reality or a dream. They were like Peter, when delivered from prison by an angel on the very night previous to his intended execution, "He went out and followed the angel; and knew not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision, [Acts 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.9)."

All their lamentations were instantly turned to joy, "their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing." The sight of such an unprecedented event filled all the surrounding nations with astonishment, and constrained them to acknowledge that it was the work, not of man, but of God, "Then they said among the heathen: The Lord has done great things for them." The Israelites themselves readily concurred in this sentiment; and, on hearing the congratulations given to them, thankfully replied, "The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad!"

2. The supplications it drew forth.

Though permission was given to them to return to their own land, and everything was provided for their sustenance along the way, and their assistance at the end of their journey—the Jews saw that there was a great and discouraging work before them; but, as nothing was impossible to Jehovah, they entreated him to perfect what he had begun, and "to turn again their captivity as the streams in the south." In the southern or hilly country of Judea there were, as in all mountainous countries, frequent and sudden inundations; which however as rapidly subsided, soon after the rains had ceased; so that, where, but a few hours before, the country bore the aspect of universal desolation, it speedily assumed the most lovely and flourishing appearance, the valleys smiling on every side with renovated and augmented verdure. Thus the Jews desired that the ravages made in their now desolated country might be soon repaired, and that, through the influence of their almighty Guardian, their efforts might be crowned with speedy and complete success.

We forbear to dwell upon the event itself, that we may enter somewhat minutely into,

II. The more glorious deliverance that was typified by it.

The event before us is undoubtedly to be regarded as shadowing forth that infinitely greater deliverance which is wrought for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. Compare [Isaiah 40:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.3-5) with [Luke 3:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.3-6). Or [Isaiah 52:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.7) with [Romans 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.15). And the correspondence between the two is particularly striking. Observe,

1. The deliverance itself.

As grievous as was the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, it was nothing in comparison with that sorer bondage to which we are subjected by the power of sin and the wiles of Satan! All indeed have not the same work assigned to them; but all are walking after the imagination of their own hearts, "being taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will."

The promised Deliverer however has arrived; has entered into the conflict with our great adversary, and utterly subdued him. Jesus, foretold by name hundreds of years before his advent in the flesh, has accomplished the work for which he was raised up; and, having now "ascended up on high and led captivity captive," he has sent his heralds to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

This is the very first use he makes of his newly-acquired power. Nor is it an empty proclamation, without any facilities afforded for carrying his gracious purposes into effect; he gives us back for the use and honor of Jehovah, all those vessels of which we had been despoiled, and which, though originally formed for the service of God alone, have, through the influence of our great adversary, been prostituted and debased to the vilest uses; yes, all our faculties and powers are now restored by him to their proper office; and the all-sufficient aid of his Spirit is promised to us throughout all our dreary pilgrimage.

Our almighty Deliverer has gone further still, and issued his commands to all throughout his vast empire, to support us in our work, and to impart to us whatever we may stand in need of, [Ezra 1:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 1.1-11). The very angels in Heaven are enjoined to attend us in all our way, to encamp round about us, to hold us up lest at any time we dash our foot against a stone, and to minister to us in all that our necessities may require.

All this too is offered to us as a free act of mercy on the part of our great Deliverer. It was one of the most extraordinary parts of the Jews' deliverance from Babylon, that Cyrus should liberate them without any remuneration; but how does it exalt beyond all estimate the value of our redemption, that it is offered to us freely, "without money and without price!"

2. The effects produced by it.

When first a soul that has been sinking under a load of sin and guilt is made to hear the tidings of a free and full deliverance, they seem to him "as an idle tale;" he can scarcely believe it possible that such mercy should be given to him, and that one who has been all his days a willing captive should be delivered; and, when the joys of this salvation burst upon his soul, he appears to himself to be, as it were, in a dream; so far does the deliverance exceed all that he could previously have conceived.

Then his mouth, which was but lately filled with lamentations and complaints, is "filled with laughter, and his tongue with singing! [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.10)."

Nor is the surprise confined to him alone; his friends and neighbors behold with astonishment the change that has taken place in him; they now see the whole course of his life changed. They behold . . .  
the chains with which he was tied and bound, now loosed;  
the sins that once had dominion over him, now mortified;  
and the griefs, which they interpreted as symptoms or forerunners of derangement, now turned to joy, and "thanksgiving and the voice of melody."

So great is the change in their eyes, that though they hate it, they are constrained to admire it, and to acknowledge the hand of God in it, "The Lord has done great things for them;" and, though they may deride it in public, they envy in their hearts the lot which they affect to despise.

As for those who experience the happy change, they thankfully adore their heavenly Benefactor, "The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad!" They take their harps that have been so long suspended on the willows, and sing the songs of Zion with inexpressible delight!

But the more they have experienced, the more they desire to possess all the fullness of the blessings prepared for them. Gladly would they, if it were possible, have all the remains of sin purged out from their hearts, and all conflicts with it forever terminated. They pant for the full attainment of the Divine image; and cry with fervor to their God, "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south!" Still however, not discouraged by the length of their journey, or the difficulties to be surmounted, or the toils which they must undergo, before they shall attain the full object of their desires, they set out in humble dependence on their God, assured of final and complete success. They are willing to "sow in tears, confident that in due time they shall reap in joy."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who have experienced some measure of this deliverance.

You have heard the parallel drawn between the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, and that of which you are the happy subjects. It remains for you to carry it yet further, and to realize it in its utmost extent. Of all the multitudes who set out on their journey towards Zion, there was . . .  
not one who was not sensible of the cruel bondage from which he had been delivered;  
not one who did not feel his obligations to Cyrus as his great deliverer;  
not one, who did not see that his provision by the way, and his supports at the close of his journey, were the fruits of that same grace that first proclaimed the deliverance!

Moreover, all of them without exception would feel a consciousness that they were not yet arrived at the place which their souls longed after; but that they were daily proceeding towards it; they felt no inclination to rest satisfied with anything they met with in the wilderness; but looked forward to the enjoyment of God's ordinances in Jerusalem as the consummation of their bliss.

Now then let it be so with you. Never for a moment lose the remembrance of your former captivity, or of your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ, who "by his own death has destroyed death, and him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and has delivered those who through fear of death were all their life subject to bondage."

Never for a moment forget that you are on a journey towards Zion, and that all your fresh springs are in that adorable Savior, who has redeemed you by his blood. Never for a moment cease to press forward in your heavenly way; but, forgetting what is behind, reach forward, like race horses, to the destined goal. Let all your hopes, and all your happiness be in Heaven.

In a word, be exactly in the state and habit of your minds, what the liberated captives were in their journey towards Zion. Then will you have attained the perfection of Christian pilgrims, and will in due time possess in all its fullness your destined inheritance!

2. To those who are yet the bond-slaves of sin and Satan.

This is the state of every man by nature. It is to little purpose to say, that we are not addicted to any gross iniquity; for "the whole world lies in wickedness," or, "in the wicked one;" and if the Captain of our Salvation has not rescued us from the hands of "the strong man armed," our very peace is a sufficient evidence of our bondage. If you are yet strangers to the experience above described, you are yet in bondage to the devil.

But we are authorized to declare that this adversary is cast down; that our Cyrus has prevailed over him; and that liberty is now given to every captive in Babylon to return to Zion. Behold, as a herald of our adorable Savior, I now announce to you these glad tidings. O! be not like so many of that ill-fated nation, who preferred their bondage to liberty, and their dwellings in Babylon to their inheritance in Jerusalem.

Put yourselves under the guidance of the true Zerubbabel, before whom "the mountains shall become a plain!" If you meet with difficulties, know that he has issued his proclamation to all his creatures, to afford you all necessary aid; and if, instead of aiding, they endeavor to obstruct you, he has engaged that all things shall work together for your good. Come out then from Babylon, every one of you; and let this be the one harmonious proposal of you all, "Come, let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord our God."

Fear not but that the object, when attained, will richly recompense all the difficulties of your way. Even in this world your "joys shall be unspeakable and full of glory;" but who can conceive the joy that awaits you in the Zion above! How will your mouth then be filled with laughter, and your tongue with singing! How will you then, in concert with all the heavenly hosts, exclaim, "The Lord has done great things for us, therefore we are glad!" Be content then to "go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed, knowing assuredly that at last you shall come again with rejoicing, bearing your sheaves with you!"

#720

SOWING IN TEARS

**[Psalm 126:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5)**

"Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy!"

This seems to be a general truth founded on the experience of those who returned from the Babylonish captivity, and the correspondent experience of all who return from the bondage of sin and Satan. The Israelites, like Peter liberated from his prison, were so astonished at their deliverance, that it seemed to them more like a dream than a reality. The very heathen themselves wondered at it, and ascribed it to the influence of Jehovah, as also the Israelites did with joy and gratitude, taking occasion from it to implore the speedy and perfect restoration of all their tribes, verses 1-4. The rain which descended in torrents on the southern or hilly country of Judea, often filled the valleys with rapid streams, which quickly passing away as soon as the rain ceased, the rivers were suddenly transformed into verdant fields. Thus sudden and perfect the Israelites desired their restoration to be.

Such also are the wonder and joy occasioned by the conversion of a soul to God; and such are the desires which instantly vent themselves in fervent petitions for complete deliverance. But as among the captive Jews, so in the enslaved soul: a season of sorrow precedes the time of emancipation. Nevertheless it shall be found universally true, that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Let us inquire,

I. What we are to understand by sowing in tears?

"The sorrow of the world works death;" and therefore cannot be that to which the promise is made. To sow in tears implies:

1. A painful recollection of **past sins**.

We all are sinners from our earliest youth; and every sin we have ever committed, is as fresh in the remembrance of God as if it had been committed this very hour. Nor should we think the less of our sins because they have been long passed; on the contrary, we should view them with all the shame and sorrow that they excited in our bosoms the very instant that our consciences first accused us.

Like God's people of old, we should be bowed down greatly in the recollection of them, [Psalm 38:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.3-8). [Jeremiah 31:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.19); [Jeremiah 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.25). [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63), and earnestly entreat, with David, that God would not call us into judgment for them, [Psalm 25:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.7).

2. A penitent concern for **present sins and infirmities**.

The very best of Christians has much within him to mourn over. It is but in part that any of us are renewed. Many are the corruptions that yet work within us; and the very imperfection of our prayers and praises is enough to make us go mourning all the day long. Paul found so much conflict in his soul by reason of his indwelling corruptions that he exclaimed, "O what a wretched man I am! [Romans 7:14-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.14-24)." and groaned earnestly for death as the season when he should be freed from all the imperfections of his nature, and serve, as well as enjoy, God with unabated ardor, [2 Corinthians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.4). Thus should we also "go softly before God in the bitterness of our souls, [Isaiah 38:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.15)," and loath ourselves before him 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).

3. An overwhelming sense of **God's goodness**.

Nothing is more characteristic of true piety than this. Every day and hour we have reason to adore the divine goodness. What patience does God exercise towards us under all our backslidings! What readiness does he manifest to return to our souls the very instant we return to him—yes, often revealing himself to us, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts, when we had no reason to expect anything but some heavy token of his displeasure!

The Psalmist, impressed with such views of God, exclaims, "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)."

But the most striking example of this frame of mind is afforded us by the poor woman, who, to express her love and gratitude, kissed the feet of her Savior, and washed them with floods of tears, [Luke 7:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.38). Would to God that such were the state of our minds, and that we might ever be found, as to our souls at least, in that posture!

Omitting many other grounds of weeping, we proceed to inquire,

II. What encouragement we have to weep?

To those who sow their grain, there is but one harvest.

To those who sow in tears, there are two harvests!

1. We shall reap in **this world**.

God will not despise the broken and contrite heart, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17); on the contrary, "he will hear the voice of our weeping;" tears, when flowing from a contrite soul, have an eloquence which God cannot resist! [Psalm 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.8). He will speak peace to the soul; he will blot out its transgressions as a morning cloud, [Luke 7:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47-48); [Luke 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.50). [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9). He will cause the light of his countenance to shine upon it; and will give unto it a spirit of adoption, whereby it shall cry with confidence, Abba, Father! [Jeremiah 31:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.9); [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20).

And will not such a harvest recompense a hundred years of weeping? Look but at the state of the Prodigal, and see him, after his short seed-time of weeping, welcomed to his father's house, and feasting with him on the fatted calf; was he not well repaid? Had he any reason to regret his tears of penitence? Thus then shall it be with us in this world, provided we be content to sow in tears, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy shall come in the morning! [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5)."

2. We shall reap also in the **world to come**.

All that the penitent soul enjoys in this world is but a pledge of what it shall hereafter possess. There is "a full reward, 2 John, verse 8," "an everlasting life, [Galatians 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.8)," which shall be reaped as the fruit of what we now sow. The *tears* we shed are all treasured up with care in the vial of our heavenly Father; every sigh, and every groan, shall be remembered before him; and shall add to that abundant and eternal weight of glory which we shall then receive. And who can estimate those "sheaves which we shall then bring with us?" How will all our sorrows vanish in an instant, and be turned into unutterable joy! [Isaiah 30:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.10). Let us then look forward to that time, and "not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who have never known anything about sowing in tears.

Is there not occasion enough for you to weep? Think how you have neglected your God and father; how you have trampled on the blood of Christ your Savior; and how you have resisted the motions of the Holy Spirit in your hearts!

Think too, how you have made the very consideration of God's mercy and forbearance an occasion of more boldness in transgressing against him! This, independent of any gross acts of sin, is sufficient to make your head a fountain of tears to run down day and night for your iniquities. "Be afflicted, then, 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, [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.9-10)."

2. To those who are daily sowing in tears.

Possibly, some may be discouraged, because they do not reap so soon as they expected. But, if this be the case, let them examine whether they do indeed "sorrow after a godly sort;" and, if they have the testimony of a good conscience in this respect, let them wait patiently, as the gardener, [James 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.7), for "surely they shall come again with rejoicing;" joy and gladness are sown for them, and shall spring up in due season, [Psalm 97:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.11).

Let them be contented to "go on their way" weeping, even though the way is ever so long; for tears are a "precious" seed unto God, and they shall bring a glorious harvest at the last!

#721

THE SPIRITUAL HARVEST

**[Psalm 126:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5-6)**

"Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall surely come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

So much of sorrow is entailed on fallen man, that his path through life is properly called a valley of tears. But it is not to the ungodly only that this portion is allotted; the man who is regenerate still finds much occasion to weep; and if he have reasons for joy peculiar to himself, so also has he for grief.

The Israelites, when restored from their captivity in Babylon, felt, as well they might, that the mercies given to them were exceedingly great. The very heathen that surrounded them were constrained to acknowledge this. But, when they came to their own land, and saw the desolations that were spread on every side, and reflected on the time and labor that must be employed in rebuilding their city and temple, on the opposition they were likely to meet with in their work, and on their utter incapacity to restore either the city or temple to their former grandeur, they might well weep.

They were, however, encouraged with the divine assurance, that God would be with them in their labors, and prosper their endeavors; and that, if they were content to "sow in tears, they would reap in joy;" yes, that every one of them who should "go forth, weeping, and bearing precious seed, would surely come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

But we must not confine ourselves to the immediate occasion on which these words were written. They refer to every one that is engaged in raising a spiritual temple to the Lord; and they assure to him a happy outcome to his exertions.

To elucidate the subject, we shall consider,

I. The events here connected.

Between seed-time and harvest there is in the minds of all a necessary connection; and as in the natural world the action of sowing has always a reference to that of reaping, so it has also in the spiritual world.

The seed which the Christian sows is "tears".

What other can he sow, when he looks back upon the transgressions of his former life? How he, from the first moment that he began to act, lived in rebellion against his God! In no respect has he been subject to the law of God, or regulated himself according to the divine commands. From open and flagrant sins he may be free; but he has lived as without God in the world, making his own will the one rule of his conduct, and his own pleasure the only end of his existence. Does not such a life as this call for deep humiliation, and require to be mourned over with floods of tears?

Nor is this contrition less called for by his sins of daily incursion. Let any man compare the frame of his mind with that which his circumstances, and God's dealings with him demand:  
how faint his gratitude for mercies received!  
how superficial his sorrow for sins committed!  
how cold his devotions at the throne of grace!  
how feeble his efforts to glorify his God!

Truly, in the retrospect of every succeeding day, he may well sit down and weep bitterly, yes, and mourn before God in dust and ashes!

In truth, this is, in a measure, the habit of the Christian's mind: he is bowed down under a sense of his own manifold infirmities; and he walks softly before God, under a consciousness of his own extreme unworthiness. If David could say, in reference to the sins of others, "Rivers of water run down my eyes, because men keep not your law," then how much more may every man say it, in reference to his own sins!

In the days to which we are looking forward, when the remnant of Israel shall return to the Lord their God, it is precisely in this way that they will come up to Zion, "They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son, [Jeremiah 31:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.9)."

From this seed, however, shall spring a harvest of "joy".

In the natural world we expect to reap the very seed which we have sown; but it is not so in the spiritual world. If we sow tears, shall we reap tears? No, never, never, never! Far different shall be the fruit arising from that seed! Even joy, yes, "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Look at the very remnant of whom we have just spoken; and see the outcome of their humiliation, "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! [Jeremiah 31:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.12-13)."

It must be observed that the first-fruits of this harvest are enjoyed even now; for the very scope of the Gospel is not only to "proclaim liberty to the captives; but to give unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them," I say, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord; and that He may be glorified! [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3)."

But, after all, this is only a foretaste of that which they shall hereafter enjoy, a cluster from Eshcol, a pledge of their future inheritance. The time is coming when they shall reap the full harvest in the fruition of their God, in whose "presence there is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore! [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11)."

The connection between these two periods being marked, I proceed to show,

II. The certainty and blessedness of this connection of sowing in tears, and reaping in joy.

1. The **certainty** of sowing in tears, and reaping in joy.

In the natural world the connection is not sure; every care may have been exercised in preparing the ground, and the best seed may have been sown in it; and yet, through blasting or mildew, or some other unforeseen calamity, the hopes of the gardener may be disappointed.

But in the spiritual world this can never occur. There may be many events which seem unpropitious, and threaten the total destruction of the life of God in the soul; but God will overrule them all for the final accomplishment of his own gracious purposes, agreeably to his own express engagement, that "All things shall work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)."

The untoward circumstances may continue for a considerable length of time; but God engages, that "though their weeping may endure for a night, joy shall assuredly come to them in the morning, [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5)." Extremely beautiful is that promise in the Prophet Hosea, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. His goings forth are prepared as the morning, [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.3)."

The benighted traveler may be ready to imagine that the morning, as it were, will never arrive. But the sun, though as remote as possible from us, will return, and is actually making a progress towards us; and has its radiance ready prepared to pour it forth for the benefit of the earth, at the appointed hour.

In the same way, in the darkest seasons of desertion is God prepared to lift up the light of his reconciled countenance upon us, and to refresh our souls with his enlightening and invigorating beams!

2. The **blessedness** of sowing in tears, and reaping in joy.

The joy of the harvestman may be fitly used to characterize the Christian's consolations here on earth, [Isaiah 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.3); but it will convey no idea of his felicity hereafter in glory; for all that here he sought and tasted shall there be enjoyed in its utmost fullness! And if the feast of which the prodigal was made to partake, on returning to his Father's house, was so blessed—then what must the banquet be which is prepared for us above!

Truly, in comparison with that, the sublimest happiness of man on earth is no more than as a twinkling star, compared to the meridian sun! To attempt to speak of the heavenly glory, is only to "darken counsel by words without knowledge;" for, what conception have we of the immediate vision of our God in the full effulgence of his glory? Or what idea can we form of that throne and that kingdom which we shall possess above? Suffice it to say, that all that the blood of Christ could purchase, and all that the love of God can bestow, is the portion reserved for every believer in the realms of bliss!

Behold, then,

1. How desirable is **true repentance**.

I grant that repentance, considered without relation to its consequences, is not a pleasing exercise of mind. Nor would a gardener find any pleasure in casting his seed into the ground, if he had no prospect of a future recompense. But both the gardener and the penitent sow in hope. Each of them knows that without sowing he can never reap; and each of them expects, that if he "sows in hope, he shall be partaker of his hope." Hence the employment is that which each of them affects.

But there is this difference between the two; the gardener is confined to a few weeks for the discharge of his duty, whereas the penitent prosecutes his labors to the very end of life; seeing that there is no day or hour which does not give him fresh occasion for penitential sorrow. He is to go forth bearing "a seed-basket" and exactly as the sower, bearing the seed-basket, scatters the seed as universally as he can over the whole field—so does the penitent, every step he takes in the field of life. And whereas one may sow too early and too much, the penitent knows that he never can too soon begin the blessed work; and that the more profusely he sows, the more abundantly he shall reap; God having ordained, in reference to this as well as to every other duty, that "he who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully! [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6)."

To all then I say, "Be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he shall lift you up! [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.9-10)." I say, To all without exception, would I give this advice; for it is by a conformity to it, under the Gospel dispensation, that every child of God shall be known, "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)."

2. How reconciled we should be to **trials**.

To the Christian there may be many storms and tempests, or a long-protracted season of distress, which may threaten the destruction of all his prospects. But as, in relation to the wheat, the frost is even desirable to destroy the vermin, so are diversities of seasons beneficial to the spiritual seed; as Peter has said, "The trial of our faith, which is much more precious than of gold, which, though it stand the trial of fire, will perish at last, will be to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ! [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7)."

It is remarkable that our blessed Lord, speaking of himself as the true vine, and of his people as the branches, says of "every branch that bears fruit, the gardener prunes it, that it may bring forth more fruit, [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.2)." It might be hoped, that, since it was already fruitful, it might escape the wounds inflicted by the pruning-knife; but that is not consistent with the will of the great Gardener, who consults its ultimate benefit in proportion to the prospect which it affords of progressive fruitfulness.

In the same way, God's dearest people are often most severely tried; and they whose sheaves shall hereafter be found most abundant, are often made to apprehend an entire failure of all their prospects.

Consider, O tempted believer, how profitable your trials have been to you. Consider how they have tended:  
to humble your pride,  
to weaken your attachment to earthly things,  
to make you feel your need of God's continual help,  
and to quicken you in your way to the heavenly Zion!

And then learn to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; and it is in love and faithfulness that you have afflicted me."

3. How sweet to the Christian should be the thoughts of **death**.

Death is as the wagons that are about to carry home the produce of the field; or as those which were sent to bear the afflicted Jacob to his beloved Joseph. The sight of these made Jacob forget all his troubles, and become indifferent to all that he possessed in this world, "He regarded not his belongings, because all the good of the land of Egypt was his! [Genesis 45:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.19-20)."

So then, brethren, let it be with you. Behold the wagons sent to bear you home, where you shall "go rejoicing, bearing your sheaves with you." Yes, the tears that you have shed have been treasured up by God in his vial! [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.8); and they shall be recompensed into your bosom a hundred and a thousand fold. Hear the declaration of God himself to this effect, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; even so says the Spirit; for they rest from their labors, and their works follow them! [Revelation 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.13)." Only view death aright, and you will account it among your most valued treasures! You will even "be looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of Christ." If it is unto you, "Christ to live"—then do not doubt for a moment but that "to die will be gain! [Philippians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.21)." For this is the irreversible decree of God, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life! [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

#722

GOD'S MERCY AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER

**[Psalm 130:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.1-4)**

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared!"

In seasons of affliction, it is a great comfort to see how others in similar circumstances, have found relief. It is in this view that biography is peculiarly interesting; and Scripture biography more especially, because it is more authentic in itself, and a surer ground for wise and profitable observations. The Psalms are a rich repository of such instruction. David was a man of deep experience. His afflictions, both temporal and spiritual, were very abundant; and, as they are faithfully related to us, so do we see under them the workings of his mind. In the passage just read we see,

I. The means David used for deliverance from his distresses.

David's trials were greatly diversified, and very severe.

Unless it were recorded on divine authority, we would scarcely conceive it possible that a man of David's character should be an object of such inveterate and envenomed malice as he was in the eyes of Saul; and, after the returns which he made to Saul, we would scarcely think that human malignity could ever arrive at such a height, or rage with such unrelenting fury, as it did in that envious and jealous monarch.

Of his troubles under persecution, David speaks under the same metaphor as that which is used in our text, "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! [Psalm 69:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.1-4)."

It seems, however, that on the present occasion he refers to his spiritual troubles, because it is of his iniquities that he chiefly complains, and of forgiveness that he expresses his chief desire. It might be supposed that so holy a man as he should have no complaints of this kind to make; but the truth is, that the more holy any man is, the more enlarged will be his views of the spirituality of God's Law, and the more painful his sense of his short-comings and defects and sins; and it should seem that David was permitted to sustain great anguish of mind on this account, so that he might be the better fitted to instruct and comfort God's tempted people to the very end of time.

Hear his complaints under a sense of God's displeasure, "You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves! [Psalm 88:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.6-7)." Sometimes he was so overwhelmed, that he thought himself altogether an outcast from God, and doubted whether he would ever find mercy at his hands,

"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?" [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9)."

Under all his trials, David had recourse to God in prayer.

"Out of the depths he cried unto the Lord," He well knew that none but God could support him under all his temporal afflictions, and that there was no other comforter amidst the troubles of his soul. Hence, on all occasions, he betook himself to God in prayer.

Under trials from man he says, "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies, [Psalm 18:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.3-6)."

And under the frowns of Almighty God David still sought refuge in the arms of him whose displeasure he feared, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of Hell got hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech you, deliver my soul, [Psalm 116:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.3-4)."

Thus did Jeremiah also, under his extremities, "They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over my head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. You have heard my voice; hide not your ear at my breathing, at my cry! [Lamentations 3:53-56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.53-56)."

Thus it is that we also, under all our troubles, should approach our God. Nor should we be discouraged because we cannot find enlargement in prayer; our feelings may be too deep for utterance; and our desires may find vent only in sighs, and groans, and tears; but, if only we are sincere, God will hear our very "breathing and our cry."

From the account which David gives us of his prayers, we learn,

II. The views of God, from whence David derived his chief encouragement.

David dared not to plead for anything on the footing of justice.

He was sensible that he in no respect came up to the perfect demands of God's Law; and that, if God should "mark his iniquities," it would be impossible for him to "stand;" since there was not an act, or word, or thought in his whole life that could endure so severe a scrutiny. Such is the view which all holy men have of their own infirmities; they know that God "charges even his angels with folly! [Job 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.18)," and that "the very heavens are not clean in his sight;" how much less can man be pure, who by nature comes from a corrupt source; and, by practice, drinks iniquity like water! [Job 15:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.14-16). Job was the most perfect man of his day; yet he says, "If I should say I am perfect, my own tongue would prove me perverse! [Job 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2-3); [Job 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20)."

In the same way, every living man must deprecate the being dealt with according to the demands of strict justice, saying, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord; for in your sight shall no man living be justified! [Psalm 143:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.2)."

David's only hope was founded on the **mercy** of his God.

Mercy is an essential perfection of the Divine nature, and, consequently, inseparable from God. But the expression, "There is forgiveness with you," intimates, that mercy is treasured up, as it were, in the Divine bosom, ready to be bestowed on every weeping penitent. We are told, that "it has pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell;" and that "out of his fullness we are all to receive," according to our respective necessities.

This was David's encouragement. Had he not known this, he would have sat down in utter despair.

It is a consciousness of this that emboldens a penitent to draw near to God, and to ask for mercy at his hands. A soul that is gone beyond the reach of mercy, hates God with a perfect hatred, and "never repents to give him glory, [Revelation 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.9); [Revelation 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.11)."

But the soul that hopes in God's mercy, feels towards him a filial fear and reverence; and this holy fear is ever augmented in proportion to the hope that is cherished in the soul.

Hence, when God says respecting his people, "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me;" he adds, "And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them. And they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity, that I procure unto it, [Jeremiah 33:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 33.8-9)."

In this view of David's experience we may see,

1. Our **dependence** on God.

To whom can we go in a time of trouble? Who can afford us even the smallest help, especially under a sense of sin, and under a dread of God's displeasure? We may possess all that the world can give, but it will not for a moment soothe the agonies of a guilty conscience. Of all things under the sun, in this view, it must be said, "Miserable comforters are you all!" Our help is in God alone! "He is the only fountain of life; and in his light alone can we see light! [Psalm 36:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.9)."

2. Our **obligations** to God.

When we see so holy a man as David brought into "depths" where he feels as one ready to perish, what thanks can we render unto God, that we are enabled to pass through life in peaceful tranquility, and with a cheerful hope of eternal life! None but those who have experienced the hidings of God's face, and the terrors of his wrath, can have any conception what it is to be reduced to such a state.

Does David say, "Fearfulness has taken hold upon me, and a horrible dread has overwhelmed me?" Why, then, is not that the condition of our souls? Who does not deserve it? Who might not well be left to sustain it throughout his whole life? If we were saved from perdition at last, it would be a mercy, for which we should have cause to bless God to all eternity. But to enjoy peace here, and the light of God's countenance, truly this is a blessing for which we can never be sufficiently thankful.

But there is yet a richer blessing given unto us; and that is, that in all our trials, of whatever kind, we have God himself for our refuge. Who need to be afraid of depths, when he has a God to go unto—a God able and willing to deliver him?

Look at the heathen, who know not God; or at those who, though in a Christian land, are unacquainted with the great mystery of redemption. They are in a pitiable condition indeed; but the believing penitent, though in darkness, has reason to rejoice; because his "sorrow will endure but for a night, and joy will come to him in the morning." He may descend with Jonah to the very precincts of Hell; but in due season he shall be brought forth to light and liberty and joy.

3. Our true wisdom.

The resolution of David, in the words following our text, should be ours. Whether in trouble or at ease, let us wait on the Lord, and "hold us fast by God."

The man who has been watching through the night looks with eager desire to the break of day, when he shall be relieved from his toil. But with far greater earnestness, and with sweeter assurance too, should we wait on God, confident that he will appear for us in the hour of need, and grant us that rest which our necessities require. Let us then live in this habit; and then, "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! [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18)."

#723

WAITING UPON GOD

**[Psalm 130:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.5-6)**

"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning!"

Many of God's people are at times reduced to great straits, either through the violence of persecution, or the force of temptation; and, under such circumstances, what refuge have they, but in God? It is in vain for them to look to the creature; and it sometimes appears to them to no purpose to wait even upon God, because the desired relief is so long delayed.

David, under delays of this kind, was sometimes discouraged; but, whatever were the depths into which he had fallen on the present occasion, it is manifest that he cast himself upon the mercy of his God, and determined to "hold fast by God," and to maintain his confidence in him even to the end.

I. I will unfold to you the experience of David.

He declares it to us in few words, "he waited upon God." And the comparison by which he illustrates the frame of his mind, will serve us as a clue, whereby to find the full import of his words.

He may possibly refer to watchmen in general, who, during a long and tedious night, wait for the morning, when they shall be released from their fatigues, and retire to their rest.

But I rather think that he refers to the Priests and Levites, whom he had appointed to watch nightly in the Tabernacle, [Psalm 134:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 134.1), and who, if they were not filled with a spirit of devotion, by which they might enjoy communion with their God, would long earnestly for the morning, when they might terminate their irksome task. But more than they, did David long for the return of God to his soul:

1. David waited upon the Lord with **earnest desire**.

No temporal distress will bear any comparison with that which is spiritual. The troubles of an awakened or tempted soul are very heavy; and the depths into which it is plunged, by an apprehension of God's wrath, are very terrible. No wonder that David "panted after the Lord, as the deer after the water-brooks, [Psalm 42:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-3)." No wonder that David, when God's answers to his prayers were delayed, he cried, "How long, O Lord! how long [Psalm 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.3); [Psalm 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 13.1-2), four times."

Nor is such importunity disapproved of God; on the contrary, he would have us "cry day and night to him, [Luke 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.7)," and give him no rest, until he arises, and comes to our relief, [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7).

2. David waited upon the Lord with **patient hope**.

Though earnest in prayer, he was willing to tarry the Lord's leisure; and would not attempt to use any unfitting means for his own relief. Repeatedly had he it in his power to slay Saul; but he would neither perpetrate the act himself, nor allow it to be perpetrated by others. He committed his cause to God, to whom alone vengeance belongs. So, in reference to the mercies he desired at God's hands, he was willing to wait. His earnestness appears in that he says repeatedly, "My soul does wait." It was not a mere wish that he entertained for relief, but a most eager desire; yet was he as far from impatience as from indifference.

He rested on the Word of God, "In his Word," says he, "do I hope." It was quite sufficient for him that God had promised to support his tempted people; and, whatever apparent contrarieties there might be between God's providence and his Word, David had no doubt but that they would all be cleared up in due season, and that not a jot or tittle of God's Word would pass away, until all were fulfilled.

3. David waited upon the Lord with **assured expectation**.

A watchman knows that the morning will at last appear; and therefore, instead of abandoning his post, he waits until the destined hour for his relief to arrive. Thus David assured himself that God would come to him at last, and reveal himself to him out of the abundance of his grace and love. The verses following my text show this to have been the real experience of his soul, and afford me occasion to:

II. I will commend the experience of David for your imitation.

Not in the context only, but in other places, does David call upon us to imitate his example, and to avail ourselves of his experience for the comfort and direction of our own souls. "I would have fainted," says he, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say on the Lord! [Psalm 27:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.13-14)." Thus would I now entreat you to mark the posture of David's soul in this season of trial.

1. Consider how suited is David's example to every one of you.

You may not have committed David's sins, or be subjected to David's trials; but where is there one of you that is not a sinner before God? Who among you does not stand in need of mercy? Who must not find his consolation altogether in the contemplation of God; saying with David, "If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared! verses 3 and 4."

Then it is plain that the same waiting spirit befits you also. Yes, in a spirit of penitence should you be crying to God, "Lord, hear my voice; let your ear be attentive to the voice of my supplications, verse 2."

And however long God may defer his answer to your prayers, you should wait with meekness and patience. "If the eyes of a servant are to the hand of his master, and the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress, then should not your eyes be unto the Lord your God until he have mercy upon you? [Psalm 123:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 123.2)." Surely you may well be as observant of God as you expect your fellow-creature to be of you. And think how long God has waited upon you; calling, but you would not hear; entreating, but you would not regard him. Shall you then be impatient, if he comes not at the first moment that you call; and that too when you are urged by nothing but a fear of his wrath, which you have so richly merited?

Know, every one of you, that it befits you to wait his appointed time; and to be satisfied if the morning never arrives until the very moment of your departure from this world of woe.

2. Consider what honor David's example gives to God.

A meek, patient, and submissive spirit honors every perfection of God!

It expresses a confidence in God's wisdom, as alone discerning the fittest time to appear in your behalf.

It shows a persuasion of God's goodness, that does not willingly afflict you, but orders everything for your greatest good, even to humble you the more deeply, and thereby to prepare you for a richer improvement of his mercy whenever it shall be given unto you.

It honors also God's power, as able to impart relief, whenever his wisdom and goodness shall judge it expedient to confer the blessing.

Above all, it glorifies God's truth and faithfulness, in that it makes the written Word a ground of hope, yes, and of an assured hope, that whatever God has promised, he will perform.

I ask then, Is it not desirable that you should be found in a posture by which God is so honored, and with which he cannot but be pleased? Let every one of you, therefore, be able to make that appeal to God, "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord! [Genesis 49:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.18)."

3. Consider what benefit David's example ensures to the waiting soul.

Justly is it said, "The Lord is good unto those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord! [Lamentations 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.25-26)."

But let us hear the Psalmist's own experience, "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 into my mouth, even praise unto our God! [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3)."

And who is there, even though he should not have been delivered to the same extent, that must not yet say, "It is good for me to draw near to God! [Psalm 73:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.28)."

I entreat you, then, to adopt the resolution of the Psalmist, "I will wait on your name; for it is good before your saints! [Psalm 52:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 52.9)." If at any time your mind is disquieted by reason of delay, check and chide your soul even as David 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 countenance, and my God! [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)."

You must never forget that appeal which God himself makes to the whole universe, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek me in vain, [Isaiah 45:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.19)." Even in this world you may be sure that God will accept and bless you; for he has said, "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint! [Isaiah 40:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.31)."

And in the world to come, can anyone doubt the acceptance of a penitent, contrite, and believing soul? You might as well doubt the existence of God himself; for he has said, that "we shall reap if we faint not, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9);" and to all his believing Israel he has engaged, that "they shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end! [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

#724

THE DUTY OF HOPING IN GOD

**[Psalm 130:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.7-8)**

"O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins!"

That advice which flows from experience is at all times most worthy of our attention. In this view the words of our text claim peculiar regard. David, in the Psalm before us, records a very signal deliverance which he had recently experienced, probably from an overwhelming sense of his own guilt and corruption; and, having informed us what methods he had used to obtain deliverance, and how effectual they had proved for his restoration to happiness, he recommends the adoption of them to all the people of God under all difficulties whatever; and assures them, that they shall not in any instance fail of success, "O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins!"

He sets before us:

I. Our **duty** to hope in God.

Hope in God, as men generally use the term, is nothing more than an unfounded expectation that God will save us, whatever is our state, and whatever is our conduct. But a scriptural hope implies a suitable regard to the things we hope for, and to him in whom our hope is placed. It implies,

1. Scriptural hope in God implies that we **pray to him with fervor**.

This was united with the Psalmist's hope, verses 1, 2; and it must also be with ours, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8). To pretend to hope in God while we neglect to spread our needs before him, is the grossest hypocrisy, and the most fatal delusion! [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37).

2. Scriptural hope in God implies that we **wait for him with patience**.

It was in this manner that David exercised his hope, verses 5, 6. Nor can we act otherwise, if we are sincere in our profession, [Romans 8:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.25). To be impatient, is an unequivocal mark of unbelief and despondency, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16). [1 Samuel 13:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 13.11-12). But to wait patiently upon the Lord's leisure, is the office and evidence of faith and hope, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3).

3. Scriptural hope in God implies that we **depend on him with steadfastness**.

The promises of God to those who seek him, must be the ground of our hope, verse 5. We are not to regard difficulties of any kind, as though they could prove any obstacle to God. However circumstances, both within and without, may seem to justify despair, we must "hope beyond and against hope, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18). [Job 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.15). [Isaiah 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.10)," assured that, as nothing is impossible with God, so not one jot or tittle of his Word shall ever fail.

This duty being of infinite importance, and of universal obligation, let us consider,

II. Our **encouragements** to to hope in God.

If we look inward, we shall find nothing but discouragement. But if, with David, we look to God, we may find abundant encouragement:

1. In God's **attributes**.

While justice bears a frowning aspect, mercy smiles on the repenting sinner. God has opened a way for the exercise of his mercy in perfect consistency with the demands of justice; and to exercise it is his delight, [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18). This attribute is as essential to his nature as wisdom, or power, or any other, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7). Nor needs he to have it excited by a view of our misery (much less by any meritorious services of ours;) it is ever "with him;" and is ready to manifest itself towards all those who call upon him, [Romans 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.12).

2. In God's **works**.

"Redemption" is the crown of all his works; and this also is with him, that he may impart it to those who groan under their sore bondage. Yes, with him is "full" redemption; he himself, as our near kinsman, (bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30).) has the right of redemption vested in him, [Leviticus 25:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.25); [Leviticus 25:47-49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.47-49); and, having ability to pay the price, he will discharge our debt, and restore us, not only to liberty, but also to the inheritance which we have so basely alienated.

3. In God's **Word**.

The declaration of his determined purpose by an inspired writer, it equivalent to an express promise. And, if the extent and certainty of this promise is considered, what an encouragement will it afford us to hope in God! There is no limitation whatever to the promise, provided, like "Israel" of old, we wrestle with God for the performance of it, [Genesis 32:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-28). However numerous and inveterate our iniquities may be, they shall "all" be pardoned, and "all" subdued, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18).

APPLICATION.

1. To prevent any abuse of this subject, we shall **guard** it.

The repetition of the name "Israel" distinctly marks the characters to whom the text is more immediately to be applied. It is the praying, waiting, and depending sinner that is exhorted to hope in God; and it is he alone who can expect redemption at the hands of God. Let such therefore see their duty and their privilege; but let those who live in the habitual neglect of God know that their "hope is as a spider's web that shall soon be swept away with the broom of destruction! [Job 8:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 8.13-14)."

2. To impress the subject more deeply on our minds, we shall **enforce** it.

The advice here given is the most suitable that can be given, and if followed, will be productive of the greatest happiness. Were any of us directed to indulge a hope of salvation from our own endeavors, we would soon perceive the folly of such advice. Every day and hour would bring us fresh occasion for despair. But in God there is nothing lacking; he has the right, the power, and the will to redeem us. Nor, if we trust in him, shall we ever be confounded, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17).

Let us therefore not limit either the mercy or power of our God; but putting away all self-righteous hopes, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3), or unbelieving fears, [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)—let us repose an unlimited confidence in our merciful and faithful Redeemer.

#725

WEANEDNESS FROM THE WORLD

**[Psalm 131:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 131.2)**

"My soul is even as a weaned child!"

Among the great variety of representations whereby the Christian's character is set forth in the Holy Scriptures, that of a little child holds a very distinguished place, [Matthew 18:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.3). To this we annex the idea of humility, and teachableness, and resignation to the will of our heavenly Father.

In this last view more especially, the behavior of a child was beautifully exemplified in the conduct of David. He had been anointed to the kingly office by God's command; yet he waited patiently for many years without ever aspiring to the kingdom, until the Lord's time came to give it him. Though he was persecuted with murderous rage and jealousy by Saul, he would never lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, or give occasion of offence to the government under which he lived. On the contrary, he appeals to God in this Psalm, that he had not indulged any ambitious thoughts, or interfered in any affairs of state, but had acquiesced in the disposals of an all-wise Providence, even as a weaned child does in the directions and government of his mother, verses 1, 2.

To illustrate this disposition of mind, we shall show,

I. What those things are from which we ought to be weaned.

The circumstances alluded to in the text will serve to direct our thoughts. David's indifference to all the pomp of royalty shows, that we should be weaned:  
from pleasure,  
from riches,  
from honor,  
from everything which we possess in this world.

Pleasure is but ill-suited to the advancement of a soul in the divine life. There are indeed pleasures which we may lawfully enjoy; but if the heart is set upon them, we cannot properly engage in that race which we are to run, or that warfare we are to maintain; nor can we have any more decisive evidence of our being still unrenewed by divine grace, [Luke 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.14). [2 Timothy 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.4). [James 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.1); [James 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.5). [1 Timothy 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.6).

Riches also may be possessed with innocence; but they must not be coveted. They should rather be considered as a snare which we are to dread, than as a blessing we are eager to obtain. They are as clay upon the feet of one that is running a race, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6), or as a weight tied to the neck of one that is swimming for his life, [Matthew 19:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.23-24). There has scarcely ever occurred an instance wherein the acquisition of them has furthered the divine life; but thousands have been retarded by them, and not a few eternally destroyed! [1 Timothy 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.9-11).

Reputation is that which men in general are most averse to sacrifice; but we must be willing to part with that, if we would be Christians indeed. If we seek the honor that comes from men, we cannot possibly be steadfast in the faith, [John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.44); we shall shrink from reproach, and prove unfaithful to God in the time of trial, [John 12:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42-43); and being ashamed of Christ, we shall cause him to be ashamed of us in the day of judgment, [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38).

There is nohing—not health, nor friends, nor liberty, nor life itself, that we should value any further than as it may be improved to the glory of God! [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2). [1 John 2:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-17). [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26). Our hearts must be weaned from all, so as to be ready to part with everything, whenever God, in his providence, shall call for it.

To evince that such a state is attainable, we shall show,

II. What methods God employs to wean us from them.

Without any indelicacy or impropriety we may observe, in allusion to the metaphor in the text, that to wean us from creature-comforts, our heavenly Parent embitters them to us, withdraws them from us, and gives us something more suitable in their stead.

Such is our attachment to earthly things, that we would never be willing to part from them, if they were not in some way or other embittered to us. God therefore, in mercy to us, mixes gall and wormwood with every cup he puts into our hands.

In the pursuit of pleasure, our brightest prospects become clouded, our highest gratifications cloy, and numberless unforeseen accidents arise to damp our joys, and to disappoint our expectations.

In the attainment of wealth, there are many cares to corrode, many vexations to disquiet us, so that we must write on all the bags that we have amassed, "This is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

The acquisition of knowledge seems to promise the most permanent satisfaction; but such is the labor requisite to attain it, and so little, after all, is within the reach of human intellect, that the wisest of men was constrained to say, "Much study is a weariness to the flesh; and he who increases knowledge, increases sorrow! [Ecclesiastes 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 1.18); [Ecclesiastes 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.12)."

Even those dear relations of life which God has given for our richest consolation, the wife of our bosom, or the fruit of our body, are not without their attendant troubles; which are designed to teach us, that "this world is not our rest, [Micah 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 2.10)," and that God alone is the proper portion of the soul.

But notwithstanding all our disappointments, we are prone to seek our happiness in the creature; on which account God is necessitated, as it were, to deprive us of things, which, if, continued to us, would rob him of our hearts. Hence it is that the dearest of God's children are often most heavily afflicted. He sees perhaps that our health, our riches, our friends, have drawn us aside from him, or impeded our progress in the divine life, or that they will prove disadvantageous to us in the outcome; and therefore he lays us on a bed of languishing, or causes our "riches to fly away," or "cuts off the desire of our eyes with a stroke."

But his design in all this is to weaken our idolatrous regard for created enjoyments, and to make us seek our happiness in him alone. And thousands have had more reason to bless him for the bereavements they have experienced, than for all the bounties he ever bestowed upon them! [Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.71); [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.75).

Nothing however will finally destroy our attachment to earthly things, until we have learned how much more suitable provision God has made for the souls of his people. When therefore God, by his providence, has embittered or withdrawn our comforts, he leads us, by his grace, to that fountain of consolation, the sacred Oracles. There he proposes himself to us as a reconciled God and Father in Christ. He sets before our eyes,  
"the unsearchable riches of Christ,"  
 the "honor that comes of God,"  
 and the "pleasures that are at his right hand forevermore."

And, having enabled us to taste of these, he makes us to despise everything in comparison with them, and willingly to relinquish the husks of this world, for the bread that is in our Father's house.

But that we may not form a wrong opinion of our state, we shall declare,

III. When our souls may be said to be as a weaned child.

The whole world, with respect to earthly enjoyments, are like a child either before it is weaned, or while it is weaning, or when it is altogether weaned.

The generality of people are like a child feeding at the mother's bosom, minding nothing but their carnal gratifications. The world, in its pleasures, riches, or honors, is the one object of their desire, the one source of their comfort. They feed upon it all the day long; they fell asleep, as it were, with it in their mouths; they are clamorous for it as soon as they are awake. In their very slumbers they frequently show, how wholly their minds have been occupied with that one object. Give them their favorite gratification, and they care for nothing else; rob them of that, and not all the world can pacify them. Such are those who have a fullness of earthly comforts.

But others, to whom these things have been embittered, or from whom they have been withdrawn, are, like a weaning child, disquieted beyond measure. They are unhappy in themselves; and they disturb all around them with their peevishness and discontent. Having lost that in which alone they found delight, they can take comfort in nothing else; yes, because of one thing of which they are deprived, they have no enjoyment of all the other things that they possess. In vain have they more suitable and substantial blessings offered them; they have no appetite for the provisions of the Gospel; they refuse that which would infinitely overbalance their loss; and they pine away in querulous lamentations, when they might be nourished with "angels' food."

Some there are, however, who with David, resemble a weaned child. They have become indifferent to carnal enjoyments. They use with gratitude whatever God has bestowed; but they do not set their hearts upon it, or consider it as essential to their happiness, [Philippians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.12). [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26). They suffer the loss of all earthly things with a holy resignation and composure of mind. Doubtless they have their feelings, like other men; but these feelings are moderated by religion, and brought into subjection to the Divine will, [2 Samuel 15:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.25-26). The more they are bereaved of earthly comforts, the more entirely do they live by faith on Christ, and the more abundantly do they grow in every grace. Afflictions drive them, not from God, but to him; and in the midst of all their bereavements they show, that they "have food to eat which the world knows not of," and "joys with which the stranger intermeddles not."

APPLICATION.

Let those whose hearts are set upon the world, remember how transient and unsatisfying their enjoyments are!

Let those who are disconsolate on account of their troubles, consider for what gracious ends God has caused them to be afflicted!

And let those who feel a measure of David's spirit, strive for yet higher attainments, in the assured expectation that the more they are weaned from all but God, the more will God communicate to them out of his inexhaustible fullness!

#726

ZION A TYPE OF THE CHURCH

**[Psalm 132:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.13-16)**

"The LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it--I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food. I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy."

The efficacy of fervent prayer is strongly marked in the Holy Scriptures; there is scarcely a saint, respecting whom any information is given to us, who may not be adduced as an example of God's readiness to answer prayer.

Solomon, if, as some suppose, he was the author of this Psalm, records the answer which God given to the supplications he had offered at the dedication of his temple; and it is worthy of observation, that the very language of his petition was made the vehicle of God's promise. Compare verse 8-10 and [2 Chronicles 6:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.41-42) with the text and the verse following it.

In considering these words we shall notice,

I. God's love to his redeemed people.

Mount Zion must be numbered among the most distinguished types, not only because its very name is given to the Church of Christ, but because God's love to his Church was represented to the world by the favors conferred on that chosen hill. As formerly on Mount Zion, so now in the Christian Church:

1. God dispenses his ordinances.

The Jews were not allowed to present their offerings in any other place; there alone were the sacrifices to be slain; and there alone were the means of reconciliation with God to be exhibited before their eyes.

In the same way, in the Church of Christ, and in that alone, have we the way of life and salvation fully opened. Among the heathen world we behold no traces of that path marked out for us in the Gospel; but wherever God has called a people to the knowledge of his Son, and appointed over them a faithful shepherd, there his Word is preached with power; there the sin-atoning blood of Jesus flows; the administration of the sacraments is not there an empty ceremony, but a lively and impressive exhibition of the doctrines of grace!

2. God grants his presence.

When the ark, which had long abode in a moveable tabernacle at Shiloh, was brought to Zion, its residence was fixed; and God, whom it represented, called that place his "rest." From that time his visible glory was revealed there; he dwelt between the cherubim; and was accessible to all through the blood of the sacrifices, and the mediation of the high-priest.

In the Church also is his glory seen, even "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Whatever may be known of him in the works of creation and providence is darkness itself, in comparison with that light which shines in his Gospel. To those, who seek his face, "he manifests himself, as he does not unto the world;" and often constrains them to cry out with astonishment, "How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty!"

3. God communicates his blessings.

When the high-priest had finished his work within the veil, he came forth to bless the people; and his Word was confirmed by God to all penitent and believing worshipers.

So now in his Church does God bless his people with all spiritual blessings. He imparts:  
pardon to the guilty,  
strength to the weak,  
and consolation to the troubled.

Whatever any of his redeemed people stand in need of, they are sure to obtain it, if they come to him in his appointed way, [Psalm 48:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 48.2-3). This, thousands can attest; this, thousands yet unborn shall, in every succeeding age, experience.

But his love to his redeemed people will yet further appear by considering,

II. The promises which God makes to his redeemed people.

These, as has been observed, precisely accord with the petitions offered. In them God assures his Church that he will bestow abundant blessings:

1. On the ordinances.

There may be in the text some reference to the assembling of all the males three times a year at Jerusalem, when it was probable that the conflux of such multitudes to one place might produce a scarcity of provisions, and thereby distress the poor. This effect God promises to counteract by giving them abundant crops.

But certainly we must understand this as relating also to spiritual food; and how delightfully is it verified under the ministration of the Gospel! The Word, dispensed in one short hour, has, like the bread multiplied by our Lord, been food for thousands! And though simple, and unadorned, has, like the vegetables given to Daniel and his companions, been more nutritious than all the dainties sent from the monarch's table! [Daniel 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 1.12-13).

2. On those who administer the ordinances.

The priests who served in the temple were clad with linen, to denote the purity that was expected of them.

But those who minister under the Gospel, provided they walk worthy of their high and holy office, shall be "clothed with salvation" itself, "in watering others, they themselves shall be watered;" and "in saving others, they themselves shall be saved."

Nor is this a blessing to themselves alone; for, in proportion as ignorant and ungodly ministers are a curse to those over whom they are placed, the superintendence of pious, intelligent, and faithful ministers must be esteemed a blessing.

3. On those who attend the ordinances.

The request made by Solomon was, that "the saints might shout for joy;" and God tells him that they shall shout aloud for joy; thus does God on numberless occasions give us more than we either asked or thought.

A faithful dispensation of the ordinances is a source of joy to many souls. The saints especially, who receive the truth in the love of it, are often enabled by it to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And this is a blessing, not to themselves only, but to the whole Church. By this they adorn, and recommend the Gospel; and are stimulated to diffuse the savor of it all around them.

INFERENCES.

1. How little reason have mere formal worshipers, to think that they belong to the true church of God!

The enjoyment of these promises is inconsistent with habitual formality; either therefore God falsifies his Word (which it were the vilest blasphemy to imagine), or the formalist is yet an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel."

2. How impotent are all attempts to destroy the Church. [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1); [Psalm 48:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 48.12-13); [Psalm 46:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.5) and [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18).

3. How strong is the Christian's obligation to serve and honor God!

Does God so delight in his Church as to make it his rest, and to load it with so many benefits? Surely every member of it should testify his gratitude by a cheerful and unreserved obedience!

#727

THE BENEFIT OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

**[Psalm 133:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 133.1-3)**

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore!"

In this Psalm we have a commendation of Christian love and unity. It seems to have been written some time after David's entire possession of the whole kingdom; when the tribes being all united under one head, the horrors of civil war were exchanged for the blessings of peace; and all who were brethren according to the flesh, enjoyed the fullest exercise of brotherly love, in union with each other, and in communion with their God. He seems to have been contemplating the blessed change, until his soul, filled with holy joy and gratitude, exclaimed, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

He then pursues the same idea, illustrating both the goodness and pleasantness of it, each by an appropriate similitude:

Its pleasantness resembling the fragrance of the ointment poured on Aaron's head.

Its goodness being justly compared to dews of Hermon or of Zion, by which a continued verdure and fertility are preserved, where without them vegetation would quickly fail.

We shall follow the line he has traced out for us, and point out:

I. The excellence of Christian unity as conducing to our present comfort.

There is no pleasure so refined, so exquisite, as that which results from the exercise of Christian love. It always cheers the bosom in which it dwells, and imparts the sublimest joy to those who meet it with corresponding emotions. It is beautifully compared with the ointment which was poured on Aaron's head at his consecration to the priestly office.

Let us briefly examine the similitude.

A full account of this ointment is given us in the book of Exodus, [Exodus 30:22-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.22-33). The ingredients of which it was composed were of the most fragrant kind; the proportions of each were minutely specified by God himself; and its use, when properly compounded, was solely confined to the things or people connected with the service of the sanctuary. It was strictly forbidden to the whole nation to form any other ointment like unto it, or to use any part of it for any other purpose than that which was ordained by God. It was itself most holy; and it made everything holy that came in contact with it. At the consecration of Aaron, it was poured upon his head in rich profusion, so that it ran down upon his beard, even to the collar of his garment; and it diffused on every side a fragrance that was inexpressibly sweet and refreshing.

Let us now consider the application of it.

With this is Christian love to be compared. Now love is altogether of divine original; every ingredient of it is formed by the hand of God himself, and the whole is compounded by him in its due proportions; and every one on whom it is poured is from thenceforth sanctified to the Lord. It is in its own nature so flowing, that when poured upon the head, it will descend upon the whole man; and so fragrant is it, that not the person himself only, but all who come in contact with him, will be refreshed with its fragrances; and more especially when a whole society or church are partakers of this heavenly unction, such is the fragrance, as to resemble as nearly as possible the courts of Heaven itself.

Say, you who have ever received this heavenly gift, whether you have not been brought, as it were, into a new world, and whether you be not breathing from day to day a new atmosphere?

Compare it with that which the world has framed in imitation of it, and which gives grace and ornament to the more polished circles of society; how poor, how vapid, how destitute of all refreshing fragrance, is that which is called politeness! The very people who most cultivate it, are most sensible what an empty formality it is; it is a mere mimicry of what is good; and in all the diversified expressions of it there is a secret consciousness that nothing real is designed; that it is a mere artificial ceremony, invented and practiced in order to keep out of sight those hateful passions, which would destroy all the comfort of social fellowship. Its very forms are burdensome to those who most abound in them; and it is a relief to a man to put them off, and to return to the unconstrained familiarities of domestic life.

We mean not to disparage that which undoubtedly contributes much to the maintenance of public order and decorum; but when compared with that love which grace inspires, it is a mere vanity; it is like a sun painted upon canvass, in comparison with the sun shining in the firmament of Heaven.

Who that lives under the influence of gracious affections, and moves in a circle where Christian love abounds, does not feel this? His spirits are not tumultuous indeed; but they are sweetly elevated towards high and heavenly things; he carries with him a divine savor, wherever he moves; when he enters into the society of the saints, or into the tabernacle of his God, the fragrance is drawn forth and greatly increased, so that "the whole house, as it were, is filled with the fragrance of the ointment." O, how pleasant is it for brethren to dwell together in unity!

As none could form a just conception of the fragrances of Aaron's ointment, but those who came within the sphere of its influence, so none can form any adequate idea of the sweetness of love, but those on whom the Spirit of God has poured this divine unction. We may however see that this representation is just, even though we should not be able fully to comprehend it; for Paul, urging with all possible importunity the exercise of love, recommends it from the consideration of the comfort imparted by it, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose! [Philippians 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.1-2)."

But the Psalmist speaks of unity as being "good," as well as pleasant; and in his illustration of it in this view, he leads us to contemplate it,

II. The excellence of Christian unity as administering to our everlasting welfare.

The effect of dew in hot desert countries is exceedingly beneficial.

In England, where rains are frequent, we have comparatively little dew; but in hot countries, where the rains are rare, the dew, as in Paradise, almost supplies the place of rain, [Genesis 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.4-5). On Hermon, and on Zion, rain came down in rich abundance. In its descent it was gentle; but in its operation powerfully influential, reviving and invigorating every plant, and fertilizing the earth on every side.

And such also is the influence of love on the souls of men.

On Zion, "God commanded his blessing" in the days of old; and on our Zion also he still commands it, "even life for evermore." But what is the principle whereby he operates this glorious change? It is love, or "faith working by love;" "Love is of God; and every one that loves, is born of God, and knows God; he who loves not, knows not God; for God is love." "God is love; and he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." "If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us, [1 John 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.7-8); [1 John 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.12); [1 John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.16)."

It is by the exercise of this divine principle that "we know we have passed from death unto life;" and "by it we are recognized by all men as Christ's disciples, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14) and [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.35)." The proper operations of this principle are distinctly and fully marked in [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.4-7); and they are most beautifully exemplified in the conduct of the primitive Christians, [Acts 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32).

Such will every church be, where love reigns; the graces of the whole collective body will flourish with ever increasing beauty and fruitfulness, [Hosea 14:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4-7); and that will be verified which God promised previously to every sabbatic year, "I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years, [Leviticus 25:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.21)."

Say then, Whether Christian love and unity are not "good?" Say whether anything in the universe can tend so much to the perfection of our nature as this; or whether there is anything that will so advance us in a fitness for our heavenly inheritance?

APPLICATION.

Cultivate then this heavenly principle of Christian love. If you seek only your own personal happiness, there is nothing that will contribute to it like this. Nor will anything so advance the welfare of the Church. Christians are one body in Christ; and when every member and every joint supplies its proper portion of this divine unction, "the whole body will grow unto the edifying of itself in love," and will in due time "attain the full measure of the stature of Christ! [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13); [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16)."

And need I say that God will be glorified when his enemies are constrained to exclaim, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" Guard then against every disposition contrary to love; and "if there be any among you who would cause divisions and offences, avoid them." In mutual forbearance and forgiveness, follow the example of Christ himself, [Ephesians 4:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.31-32); [Ephesians 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.1-2). Thus shall you be fitted for those realms of love and joy, where all the countless multitudes of the redeemed unite in one harmonious song of praise to God and to the Lamb forever and ever!

#728

A CALL TO ADORE GOD FOR HIS MERCY

**[Psalm 136:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 136.26)**

"O give thanks unto the God of Heaven; for his mercy endures forever!"

Praise is the employment of Heaven; and praise should be the employment of earth also. "Rejoice evermore," is a special command of God; and to express our joy in praises and thanksgivings is equally commanded, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

The calls which are given to us in the Psalms to the performance of this duty are very numerous; but in none more urgent than in the Psalm before us. The particular object here proposed as the subject of our thanksgivings, is the mercy of God, which we are here called upon to contemplate and adore.

Let us then, in compliance with the Psalmist's exhortation, endeavor,

I. To **contemplate** the mercy of God.

Two things in particular respecting it we would propose to your consideration:

1. The **unbounded extent** of God's mercy.

The Psalmist, after speaking of mercy as constituting one of the most glorious attributes of God, verse 1, notices the manifestations of it which we behold in all the wonders . . .  
of creation, verses 5-9,  
and providence, verses 10-22,  
and redemption, verses 23, 24.

While we acknowledge the hand of God in these things, we are but too apt to overlook his mercy as displayed in them. But on this, we should principally fix our attention, as being most calculated to inflame our love and gratitude towards our heavenly Benefactor.

Contemplate then the benefits which you receive from the sun, and moon, and stars, and from the infinitely diversified productions of this terraqueous globe.

Then behold all the interpositions of God in behalf of his people Israel, and see in them what he is yet daily performing both for the bodies and souls of all who trust in him.

Then, in the temporal redemptions given to Israel under their most desperate and degraded states—behold the redemption of our souls from sin and Satan, death and Hell, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are subjects of contemplation which might well occupy the mind of the highest archangel, and which therefore deserve our most serious attention.

But we would more particularly recommend to every one to consider the mercies which he himself has received; we would have every one trace them from his earliest infancy to the present moment; and, in reference to those interpositions of God which appear to have been more conspicuous, we would recommend that they be inspected with peculiar care, entering minutely into all the particulars of each, and viewing in each distinct particular the transcendent mercy of God.

Let the Psalm before us be particularly noticed in this view as a pattern, verse 9-22. When we take only a superficial view of things in the general, we remain unaffected by them; it is by entering into them in the detail, and dwelling on the minutest particulars, that we get our hearts properly affected by them. This therefore we would most earnestly recommend to all who would obtain a due sense of the mercies conferred upon them.

But we must not imagine that the dispensations which have been pleasing to flesh and blood have been our only mercies; for among our severest trials will be found, for the most part, our richest mercies. The successive trials of Joseph were of the most painful nature; yet they were all mercies in disguise. If we descend to more trifling incidents, such as Balaam's donkey proving restive, and crushing his foot against a wall, and afterwards falling with him, they, as we know, were the very means by which his life was saved, [Numbers 33:22-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 33.22-33).

Thus the things which grieve and irritate us at the time may be the most merciful dispensations that we could possibly have received; and we ought to receive them as expressions of God's love, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6), sent to promote our good in this world, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28), and to work for us an augmented weight of glory in the world to come! [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18).

Even the darkness and temptations with which our souls may be oppressed, must also be numbered among the means which God in his infinite mercy makes use of for the humbling and quickening, the sanctifying and saving, of our souls! [Isaiah 27:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.8-9) and [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15) and [Psalm 25:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.10).

2. The **everlasting duration** of God's mercy.

See how the mercy of God wrought in all the days of old, even from the foundation of the world! Precisely in the same manner God's mercy still operates, and shall ever continue to operate, towards all who fear his name, [Psalm 103:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.17). God will not withdraw it from those who are united unto Christ by faith, [Psalm 89:28-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.28-36). He may hide his face from them for a season; but with everlasting mercies will he gather them, [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10).

The repetition of this truth twenty-six times in as many verses is a very sufficient pledge to us that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)," and that "whom he loves, he loves to the end! [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1)."

Having contemplated, though so imperfectly, the mercy of our God, we now call upon you:

II. To **adore** the mercy of God.

A tribute of praise and thanksgiving for such mercy is the least that can be demanded of us. And well may it be demanded; for,

1. Praise and thanksgiving for mercies received, are due from us.

Can we conceive that, after all the mercies given unto us, no return is required? Are we to be as stupid and insensible as beasts? Is this a state that befits people who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son?

Perhaps it will be said by some: I have not yet obtained a saving interest in Christ; how then can I render thanks for what I have never received?

To this we reply: Have you no temporal mercies for which to give thanks? And, if you are not yet partakers of spiritual mercies, have you no reason to thank God for the offer of them, and for not having been yet visited with the judgments which you have so richly merited? Think what is the state of millions who have not committed either more or greater sins than you; and what might at this moment have been your state also, if God in his infinite mercy had not spared you; and given you space for repentance? Do but think of this, and you will want no further incentive to gratitude and thanksgiving.

But think also of the offers of salvation now made to you—a salvation free, and full, and everlasting! O! what thanks does this call for at your hands! What if one such offer were now made to those who are shut up under chains of everlasting darkness and despair; would no thanks be expressed by them? I call upon you then to give thanks unto the God of Heaven, who yet waits to be gracious unto you, and "whose patience you should account to be salvation."

2. Praise and thanksgiving for mercies received, are pleasing and acceptable to God.

The acknowledgment so often repeated in the Psalm before us has received more striking tokens of God's approbation than any other that was ever uttered by mortal man! David, knowing how acceptable it would be to God, appointed officers for the express purpose of repeating it in the service of the tabernacle, 1 Chronicles 16:41. And when Solomon had brought the ark of God into the sanctuary that he had prepared for it, and the priests were singing the praises of God in the very words of our text, at that moment God descended into the sanctuary, so that the priests could no longer stand to minister there by reason of the overwhelming presence of the Divine glory! [2 Chronicles 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 5.13).

Another and no less remarkable testimony of God's approbation was that which was given to Jehoshaphat's use of these words at the time that he was going forth against three confederate armies; at the very instant that the priests began to utter this acknowledgment, God set the three confederate armies against each other, and stirred them up to kill one another; until they were utterly destroyed, without any conflict on the part of Israel, [2 Chronicles 20:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.21-23).

What greater proof can we have of the delight which God feels in the exercise of mercy, and in commending it to the admiration of the whole universe? Begin then this song; continue this song throughout the day; let every fresh occurrence call forth fresh acknowledgments of the mercy of your God; and rest assured that the more you abound in these expressions of your gratitude, the richer displays you shall have of the Divine glory, and the more entire victory over all your spiritual enemies!

#729

GOD'S WORD EXALTED

**[Psalm 138:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.2)**

"You have exalted above all things your Name and your Word!"

A devout mind will never lack occasions for praising God; but there are some occasions whereon it will find peculiar liberty and enlargement. If, for instance, we have been in deep affliction; if we have had recourse to God in prayer; if we have laid hold on his promises, and pleaded them before him; and, in particular, if we have had them accomplished to our souls; this process prepares the mind, quickens it, elevates it, and so fills it, that it cannot but express its feelings in gratitude and praise.

David had, under some deep affliction, used these means for relief, and found their efficacy, "In the day when I cried, you answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul, verse 3." Constrained by a sense of this great mercy, he breaks forth into this devout acknowledgment, "I will praise you with my whole heart; before the gods (that is, in the presence of all the great ones of the earth) will I sing praise unto you. I will worship towards your holy temple, and praise your name for your loving-kindness and for your truth (which, in this particular instance, you have so signally displayed;) for you have magnified your word above all your name;" and have shown that it shall infallibly be fulfilled to all who trust in it.

From these words I will take occasion to show,

I. What honor **God** puts upon his Word.

"You have exalted above all things your Name and your Word!" He has revealed himself in part, by his works of Creation and Providence; but far more abundantly by his Word.

1. God has given us his Word as a **mirror**, to reflect his glory.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handy-work, [Psalm 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.1)." "From them may his eternal power and Godhead be clearly seen, [Romans 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.20)." In his providential dealings, also, is much of his wisdom and goodness exhibited. But of his perfections, generally, we can form no idea from these things; of his purposes we can know nothing. The state of the heathen world clearly attests to this; for they behold the wonders of creation and providence, as well as we, "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard; their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world, [Psalm 19:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.3-4)."

But in the sacred volume all the glory of the Godhead shines; there we are admitted, so to speak, even to the council-chamber of the Most High; to hear the covenant entered into between the Father and the Son; the Father engaging to give to him a seed, whom he should have for his inheritance; if he, on his part, would "make his soul an offering for their sins," and, in their nature, expiate the guilt of their iniquities, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10) with [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8). This mysterious transaction having taken place in the incarnation and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, we behold all the attributes of God united and harmonizing in a way that they never did, nor could, by any other means; we see justice more inexorable, than if it had executed vengeance on the whole human race; and mercy more abundant, than if it had spared the whole human race without any such atonement. There, as it is well expressed, "Mercy and truth are met together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other! [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)." Of this great mystery we find not a trace in the whole creation besides; but in the Word it is reflected, as in a mirror, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18); and shines so bright, that the very angels around the throne are made wiser by the revelation of it to the Church, [Ephesians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.10).

2. God has given us his Word as a **standard**, to which everything may be referred.

Of God's will we know nothing, but from the Word, "we know neither good nor evil from all that is before us." What God requires of us, nothing in creation or providence can inform us.

What God will do for us, we cannot ascertain.

How God will deal with us in the eternal world, we cannot learn.

But, in the sacred volume, all is written as with a sun-beam.

There is nothing which God expects us to do for him, which is not there most explicitly declared.

There is nothing which he engages to do for us, that does not form the subject of a distinct promise.

The whole of his procedure in the day of judgment is there laid open:  
the laws by which we shall be judged;  
the manner in which the testimony, whether against us or in our favor, shall be produced;  
the grounds on which the sentence of condemnation or acquittal shall be passed.

Yes, the very state to which every person, either as acquitted or condemned, shall be consigned; all is so clearly made known, that every person, who will judge himself with candor now, may assuredly anticipate his fate. There is nothing left to conjecture.

Every man has a standard to which he may refer, for the rectifying of his judgment in every particular; so that nothing can be added, for the instruction of our minds, or the regulation of our future expectations.

3. God has given us his Word as a **fountain**, from whence all his blessings emanate.

Great blessings, beyond all doubt, flow down to us through the works of creation and providence; in fact, they are incessantly administering to our welfare; for "God opens his hands, and fills all things living with plenteousness." Still, however, the benefits derived from them are only temporal; whereas those which the inspired volume imparts are spiritual and eternal—from thence we derive all our knowledge of divine truth, and all our hopes of everlasting salvation. Nor is it the knowledge only of truth that we obtain, but the operation and efficacy of it on our souls. There is in divine truth, when applied by the Holy Spirit, a power to wound, to heal, to sanctify, to save! [Psalm 19:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7-11).

When the Word comes to the soul with power, the stoutest heart in the universe is made to tremble. When the Word is poured out as balm, the most afflicted creature under Heaven is made to leap for joy. Look over the face of the globe, and see how many, who were once under the unrestrained dominion of sin, are now transformed into the image of their God. And then ascend to Heaven, and behold the myriads of the redeemed around the throne of God, uniting their hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb; to this state were they all brought by that blessed word, which alone could ever prevail for so great a work.

Thus it is that God has magnified his Word; and thus it is that he will magnify it to the end of time; yes, through eternity will it be acknowledged as the one source of all the blessings that shall ever be enjoyed!

Does God so honor his Word? Surely, then, we may see,

II. What honor **we** should put upon God's Word.

I will here content myself with specifying only two particulars:

1. We should regulate ourselves altogether by God's Word.

We should know no other rule, either for our faith or practice. Whatever God's Word speaks, we should receive with the most implicit confidence. Reason must judge whether there be sufficient evidence of its divine origin; but, that once admitted, the whole must be received by faith. We are not to be sitting in judgment on God's Word, and saying, I cannot understand how there should be three persons in the Godhead; or how the Son should become incarnate; or how the Holy Spirit should dwell in the heart of a believer; or how we should be ultimately saved by a righteousness not our own. I say, we are not called to sit in judgment upon these things, but to receive them on the authority of God himself, who alone knows the manner of his own subsistence, or what is that mode of imparting salvation which is most suited to his own divine character.

If it is thought that to expect a rational being so to submit his reason to the authority of revelation, is to require a sacrifice that is unworthy of him; I answer, that this is the very way in which all human knowledge is acquired. What knows a child, for instance, respecting the elements of language? You tell him, but in terms which he cannot comprehend, what grammar is, and what its rules are for the construction of language. What your instructions mean, he has no conception; but he takes for granted, that what you tell him is true; and from first receiving it simply on your authority, he comes, in time, to see that things are so, and must be so; that there is, in fact, no other way of communicating any abstract idea; and that, by that contrivance, we may open to the mind of another person the very inmost recesses of our own.

Thus, in receiving the mysterious truths of God, we first take them on the authority of our Divine Teacher; then, gradually finding that they correspond with our own experience, we see that they are precisely as they have been represented to us; then we come to find that they could not be otherwise; and, in the outcome, we obtain such views of their individual importance, their general harmony, and their mutual subservience to the glory of God in the salvation of man, that we have no more doubt of them than of our own existence!

But it is not in speculative views that we must rest; we must, if we would indeed magnify the Word, take it also as the rule of our conduct. We must not take offence at anything because it requires more than we are disposed to yield; but, instead of lowering the command to our attainments, we must endeavor to elevate our attainments to it. The very "thoughts and imaginations of our hearts must be brought into obedience to God's blessed Word;" and our whole souls be cast into it, as into a mold! [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17), not leaving a lineament in that unimpressed upon our souls, or retaining a feature upon our souls unconformed to that.

This is the way in which we are to honor the word; and to fail in any part of this, is to refuse it that entire submission which it requires at our hands.

2. We should endeavor to circulate God's Word to the very ends of the earth.

This must follow as a matter of course.

For, do we possess a mirror that reflects all the glory of our God; and shall we not desire that every human being may behold its light?

Have we a standard to which everything that is interesting to man may be referred; and shall we not give to the whole world the advantage of it?

Have we a fountain from whence all imaginable blessings flow; and shall we keep it to ourselves, and not endeavor to impart its blessings to every man?

Surely we must rather pant for an opportunity to make it known to the whole world. We must strive to circulate it through every country under Heaven, whether civilized or savage; we must be ready to engage in translating it into every language in the world, in order that all men may be able to read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God.

To preach it, too, we should account our highest honor, though it is among the most uncivilized nations of the earth; nor let it be thought that the most transcendent talents can be applied to any better purpose than this. On the contrary, the more eminent any person's talents are, the more should we urge him to consecrate them to the blessed work of translating this sacred volume into languages in which it has never yet appeared, and of instructing his fellow-creatures who are yet sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. Even an angel from Heaven accounts it an honor to carry this book through the vast expanse of Heaven, "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, [Revelation 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.6)."

Let it not then be thought an occupation unworthy of us; and, while we are earnestly praying to God that he would send forth his light and his truth to every quarter of the globe, let us, by every possible means, endeavor to promote this glorious and blessed object. Let us first seek to have "the Word of Christ dwelling richly in all wisdom" in our own souls, and then labor that "it may have free course, and be glorified" throughout the earth.

#730

ANSWERS TO PRAYER

**[Psalm 138:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.3)**

"In the day when I cried you answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul!"

The blessed Word of God abounds with promises, with promises of all that we can need—grace, mercy, peace, strength, victory. But will these promises be so performed, that a poor sinful man like ourselves shall be conscious of the performance of them to his own soul?

Here is the peculiar excellency of the Book of Psalms; in which we have a record of David's own experience. We see in this book a faithful delineation of a man's fellowship with his Maker; and, in the words which I have read, a testimony that God had fulfilled his Word, yes, and "magnified it above all his name."

I. Let us consider David's testimony to the compassion of his God.

David was in the habit of spreading all his needs before God.

Exceedingly had he been tried from his youth up. With such unrelenting malignity was he persecuted by Saul, that nothing but a direct interposition of God could preserve him. But he committed his cause to God in prayer. And when no hope, according to human appearances, remained to him, "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God [1 Samuel 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.6)."

And from God he received many signal answers to prayer.

Of this he testifies with much joy and gratitude. [Psalm 18:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.4-6); [Psalm 34:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.3-6). In my text, he particularly declares that God's answers to his prayers had been both speedy and effectual. "In the very day that he cried, God had answered him," when he was shut up in the city of Keilah. He had heard that Saul was coming to besiege him there; and he had reason to fear that the men of Keilah would deliver him up into the hands of Saul. On both of these points he sought information from the Lord, who knew perfectly not only what designs actually existed in the minds of men, but what would be formed under any circumstances which might occur. Here was no time for delay; nor did God delay to give him the information he desired. Thus, through the speed with which his prayer was answered, his life, together with that of his followers, was preserved, [1 Samuel 23:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.9-12).

Exceeding abundant, too, had been God's gracious communications to him in answer to his prayer. Any man who was not miraculously sustained by God would have sunk under the weight of his afflictions, or at least would have availed himself of the opportunities which were repeatedly afforded him of terminating them by the death of his inveterate enemy. But, though urged to it by his own friends, he would never consent to such a method of extricating himself from his calamities, [1 Samuel 24:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.4-7); [1 Samuel 26:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.7-12). Well might he say, as in my text, "You strengthened me with strength in my soul;" for, if not strengthened in a very extraordinary degree from on high, he never could have maintained such a conduct as this.

II. Let us consider the instruction to be derived from David's testimony.

It would be impossible in one discourse, or in many, to unfold all the important lessons that are to be learned from this testimony; I will, therefore, confine myself to two:

1. The efficacy of prayer.

O that this were duly considered! How urgent should we be at the throne of grace! Who among us should not be able to bear the same testimony with David, if, like him, we habituated ourselves to fervent and believing prayer? Never did God say to any, "Seek my face in vain." No; he is "a God that hears prayer." "The prayer of the upright is his delight." And such is the efficacy of it, when poured out in faith, that, when he had determined to punish Israel for their iniquities, he forbad Moses to intercede for them; saying, "Let me alone, that I may consume them;" that is, 'If you intercede for them, you will bind my hands, so that I cannot execute the threatened vengeance; and, therefore, let me alone, that I may be free to act.'

Be assured, brethren, that while you have a heart to pray, God has an ear to hear and answer. David succeeded by "worshiping towards God's holy Temple verse 2;" and shall not you, if you direct your prayer to Him wham the Temple typified, even the Lord Jesus Christ? Shall it be in vain to supplicate your incarnate God, or to go to the Father in the name of his dear Son? Try it; and you shall soon have to say with David, "I will praise you with my whole heart; before the gods will I sing praise unto you; for in the day when I cried, you answered me! verse 1."

Yes, you shall understand, by sweet experience, the truth of that promise, "It shall come to pass, that 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)." Nay, more, your God will do for you not only what you ask, but "exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think."

2. The use and intent of trials.

We are apt to regard trials as enemies that are greatly to be dreaded; (and, no doubt, "they are not for the present joyous, but grievous;") but they are indeed blessings in disguise. They are often sent:  
to quicken us to prayer;  
to make us feel our dependence on God;  
and to reveal to us the abundance of his condescension and grace.

What would David have known of God comparatively, if he had not been placed in circumstances of great difficulty, where none but God could help him, and where God, in answer to his prayers, appeared for his support? No man ever more abounded in praises than he; but they all had their foundation in the deliverances given in answer to his prayers. When, therefore, any trial comes, say with yourselves: Now God is preparing me for richer discoveries of his own glory; and if he makes me to feel my own weakness, it is only that he may "perfect his own strength in and by that weakness." Do not fear, then, to go into any depths; since from them shall your prayer come up, even us Jonah's did, into the ears of the Most High; and God will take you from them, to set your feet upon a rock, and to fill you with praises and thanksgivings to him for the manifestations of his love.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who restrain prayer before God.

The generality of professors know not what prayer is, but content themselves with reading or reciting a form in which they feel no interest. And of those who have on some particular occasions called upon his name, how many relapse into a cold and formal state, as though they had ceased to need the blessings which they once solicited! Alas! what enemies are both of these characters to the real welfare of their own souls! They are enemies even to their present happiness, and much more to their happiness in the world to come.

This I must say to all people of this description, "You have not, because you ask not;" nor can you ever have pardon, or peace, or holiness, or glory—in any way but in that of humble, fervent, and believing prayer. You must "open your mouth wide," if ever you would have it "filled" with spiritual and eternal blessings!!

2. Those who can unite in David's testimony respecting the compassion of their God.

Go on, and "pray without ceasing." There never is a day when you cease to need a supply of spiritual good; and never shall your importunity displease your God. "Do not be straitened in yourselves, and never shall you find that you are straitened in him." Live a life of prayer, and you shall never be disappointed of your hope, [Isaiah 40:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.31). Be instant in prayer, and you may say with David, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me! verse 7." You may add, too, with equal confidence, "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me! verse 8." What delightful thoughts are these! and how will you "sing in the ways of the Lord, verse 5," when your mind is so occupied!

This is the proper walk of a Christian; and every communication received from God, in answer to your prayers, shall be a pledge and foretaste of yet richer blessings in the realms of bliss!

#731

THE GOSPEL A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

**[Psalm 138:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.4-5)**

"All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth. Yes, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord; for great is the glory of the Lord."

In the Psalms of David, it is often not easy to find out the connection between the different parts, so as to reduce them to the form of a regular composition. The inspired writer seems on many occasions to have recorded the feelings of his soul without any particular attention to order and method; and sometimes, unconsciously as it were, to have passed from what respected his own personal concerns, to events far distant, relating to the Church of God under the reign of the Messiah.

If we suppose the Psalm before us to have been written soon after his establishment on the throne of Israel, we may regard the words of my text as expressing the satisfaction which that event would afford to all the surrounding nations, when they should hear of the wonderful events by which it had been accomplished. But it is manifest, that, if that be in any degree the import of his Words, it can never comprehend their full meaning.

Beyond a doubt, the holy man is led, from the contemplation of the mercies given to himself, to speak of those which shall be given to the whole world in the millennial age; when all the kings of the earth shall become the monuments of God's love and mercy, and shall walk joyfully before him in obedience to his will.

From the words thus explained, I will take occasion to show,

I. The felicity of the latter day.

Here we see,

1. Of whom the Church will be composed.

Under the Jewish dispensation, it was confined almost exclusively to the descendants of Abraham and the twelve Patriarchs, or, I should rather say, to a very small remnant of them; for "they were not all Israel who were of Israel, [Romans 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6)."

And since the Gospel kingdom has been established, the true Israel have been found chiefly among "the poor, whom God has more especially chosen to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)." As in the Apostle's days, so at this time, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, [1 Corinthians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26)."

But in the millennial age, people of every rank, and of every nation under Heaven, will flock to Christ, even "as doves to their windows;" as the Psalmist says, "All the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him, [Psalm 22:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.27); [Psalm 86:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.9)." Among these, the kings and governors shall bear a most conspicuous place; all of them, instead of being found, as formerly, among the persecutors of the Lord's people, "bringing their glory into the Church, [Revelation 21:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.24)," and "becoming themselves her nursing-fathers, and their queens her nursing-mothers, [Isaiah 49:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.22-23)." Nor shall this prevail among a few only; for "the kings of Tarshish and of the Isles shall bring presents to our adorable Redeemer; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts unto him; yes, all kings shall fall down before him; and all nations shall serve him, [Psalm 72:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.10-11)."

2. What will be the frame of their minds.

As little as the praise of our Redeemer is now heard, it will be proclaimed then by all; the praises of our God will resound in every place, and universal joy be diffused among the servants of the Lord. The noise, that is now accounted mirth, will cease; and the revelings, which are now regarded as sources and scenes of joy, will be put away as unworthy of the Christian profession. There will then be nobler sources of delight opened to the whole Christian world; and all of every rank will find their chief happiness in the service of their God.

This is the testimony of all the inspired writers; who uniformly concur in this, that it will be a season of universal joy; men everywhere "coming with singing unto Zion, and with everlasting joy upon their heads; all of them being filled with joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing having fled away! [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.10)."

3. What discoveries they will have of God.

No wonder their happiness will be so exalted, when God shows forth his glory in the midst of them. "Great will then be the glory of the Lord," as displayed in the person, and work, and offices of Christ, and in the manifestations of his love to the souls of men. Yes, "when the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory, [Psalm 102:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.16)." And great indeed will be the splendor of that day, "The moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord Almighty shall reign in Mount Zion, and before his ancients, gloriously! [Isaiah 24:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 24.23)."

Yet let us not imagine that these blessings are so reserved for future ages, as not to be enjoyed in our day. No; we are in reality as much interested in them as men can be at any period of the world; and therefore I call upon you to contemplate:

II. The felicity which we also are privileged to enjoy.

1. The word which they of the latter day will hear, is preached unto us.

The Gospel was in a measure preached to Abraham, [Galatians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.8); but how much more to us! By Christ and his holy Apostles God has made known to us his mind and will without reserve; nor have we any reason whatever to think that any addition shall ever be made to the inspired volume. Further light, indeed, will be thrown upon it, by the fulfillment of prophecy; and a more abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit will be given to men, for the comprehension of it; but the entire Gospel is given to us, as much as it ever will be to them; and, if we pray to God for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, we have no reason to doubt but that we shall be guided into all truth, even as they. Beloved brethren, you hear of a Savior, and of all the wonders of redeeming love. The salvation of Christ is set before you, in all its freeness, in all its fullness, in all its suitableness, in all its excellency and glory. The grounds of joy are made known to you, even as they were by the Apostles themselves to those to whom they ministered; so that, in this respect, it may be truly said, that "nothing that could be profitable is kept back from you," but that "unto you is declared all the counsel of God."

2. And have not we the same interest in it as they?

Yes, surely; and if we have been enlightened by it, we have as much reason for praise and gratitude and joy as ever they can have. Tell me, you who have been redeemed from death and Hell, and that by the blood of your incarnate God—tell me whether every feeling of your souls should not be swallowed up in joy, and every word of your lips be only praise? It is a shame to the Christian world that religion is at so low an ebb among them. Truly, brethren, the lukewarmness that reigns among the professors of the present day is highly discreditable to us, and reflects dishonor on the Gospel itself. Why are we not "singing in the ways of the Lord?" Why do we not goon our way, rejoicing, all the day long? Is it not said of true Christians, that, "though they have never seen Christ—yet, believing in him, they rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

I will further add,

3. Does not the Lord manifest his glory to you also?

Yes, truly, "the glory of God shines as truly as ever, in the face of Jesus Christ;" and shall be manifested unto you, even as it was in the Apostolic, or shall be in the Millennial, age, if only you will seek him with your whole hearts. Blessed be God! there are, even at this day, some at least "to whom Christ is precious;" some who behold him as "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);" and who, "beholding his glory, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18."

And why should one among you remain destitute of this blessing? There is not so much as one among you all to whom Christ would not come in the most endearing manner, if you would but seek him, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23). If only you would, with Moses, say, "Lord, show me your glory," "He would make all his goodness to pass before your eyes! [Exodus 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-19)."

To all of you, then, I would address the following requests:

1. Seek to form a right estimate of the Christian religion.

Religion is not, as too many imagine, a source of melancholy, but a fountain of unutterable joy! [Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17). If it deprives you of carnal delights, it will give you infinitely richer and purer pleasures in their stead.

2. Endeavor to get an experimental acquaintance with it in your own souls.

Do not be satisfied with speculative views of divine truth; but get such a sense of it as shall fill your mouth with praise, and cause you to "sing in the ways of the Lord" all the day long. The command to you, as much as to any child of man, is, "Rejoice evermore; rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice!"

3. Labor to circulate the knowledge of it through the whole world.

Blessed be God! the higher ranks are now beginning to mingle their praises with those of the other classes of the community. The circulation of the Word of God, and the sending forth of missionaries to explain and enforce it, are now objects of solicitude to an extent that they have never been, since the days of the Apostles. Unite then, all of you, in this blessed work; and cease not, until "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

#732

GOD'S VIEWS OF THE LOWLY AND OF THE PROUD

**[Psalm 138:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.6)**

"Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar."

Whatever we find in Scripture to have been God's dealings with his people of old, the same may we expect to receive from him at this day—so far as our situation and circumstances require it. His interpositions, either in a way of chastisement or protection, may be less visible than formerly; but they are neither less certain, nor less real.

We may imagine that because we are not under a Theocracy, as the Jews were, we are not authorized to believe that the great God of Heaven and earth will interest himself about us; but in every age "his eyes are still both upon the evil and the good;" and "though he is high—yet will he have respect unto the lowly; but the proud he will behold afar off."

In this declaration of the Psalmist we see,

I. A truth acknowledged

This part of the subject, though essential to a just view of the whole, should be passed over very briefly; the bearing of it being the main point to be insisted on.

God is high, even "the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15)." "Heaven is his throne, and earth is his footstool, [Isaiah 66:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1)." "The Heaven of heavens cannot contain him, 1 Kings 8:27." "He dwells in light which no man can approach unto; and him no man has seen, or can see, [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16)." His greatness is displayed in all the works of creation, which sprang into existence at his command and in all the works of Providence, also, is it manifested . These are opened at great length by God himself, Job 38-41. But the bare mention of the passage will be sufficient; for "in him all things live, and move, and have their being! [Acts 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.28)."

We may say, then, respecting him, that "He is great, and greatly to be feared; and that his greatness is unsearchable! [Psalm 145:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.3)."

This truth being unquestionable, let us consider,

II. The proper bearing of God's greatness on the different classes of mankind.

Because of the greatness of the divine Majesty, both good men and wicked, though on different principles, imagine, that he will not condescend to notice them; the good, from a sense of their own unworthiness; and the wicked, from an idea that it would derogate from God's honor to concern himself about the affairs of men. But he will notice, and in a way suited to the characters of each,

1. "The lowly".

As David, in reference to the temple which he desired to build, said, "Will God in very deed dwell with man on the earth?" In the same way, people under a sense of their own sinfulness are often ready to think that God will never listen to their prayer, or deign in any way to notice them, [Psalm 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.4); But greatly are they mistaken; for "though the Lord is high—yet will he have respect unto the lowly." Yes, if there were but one contrite soul in the universe, God would look through all the shining ranks of angels that surround his throne, to behold that favored object; nay, more; he would come down from the highest heavens to visit and revive him. He would even make that man's bosom his habitation.

And though the man's state on earth were so abject, that he had no better place whereon to rest his weary limbs than "a dunghill—yet would God raise him from thence, to set him among the princes in his kingdom, [Psalm 113:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 113.4-8)." Such respect would God show him, that his every prayer would be heard, and his every desire, so far as it was for his good, be granted, [Psalm 145:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.19). The very sighs of such a one would be as music in the ears of the Most High God; and "his every tear be treasured up in Jehovah's vials, [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.8)," as a most valued monument of his creature's love.

2. "The proud".

Such are they who have no consciousness of their ill desert, no deep contrition on account of it. These, from a mistaken view of the divine Majesty, are ready to exclude Jehovah from the concerns of this lower world, as though they were beneath his notice, [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12). Whereas, there is nothing great or small in the eyes of Jehovah! Nor is it any more degradation to him to attend to the concerns of the smallest insect that floats invisibly in the air, than to the affairs of the mightiest empire upon earth.

But, in fact, these people wish to be hidden from the cognizance of the Most High; they have no desire that he should inspect their hearts, or interfere in any of their concerns. But God takes notice of them and of their ways, no less than the ways of others; and records in the book of his remembrance all their proud thoughts, and their atheistical imaginations. "He knows them afar off," with holy indignation. No access have they to him; no gracious communications from him.

"The lowly" can say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." But not so "the proud." They may come, like the Pharisee, to the very altar of God, to tell God how good they are; but it is the self-abasing Publican alone that goes away justified, or receives any tokens of God's approval.

In death, too, the proud will be left, if not a prey to terror—yet at all events, without any sense of redeeming love, or any foretaste of that blessedness which is the exclusive portion of the contrite and believing soul.

And, O! what will be his reception in the eternal world? There, indeed, will God "know him afar off," and dismiss him from his presence with that indignant reproof, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you worker of iniquity! [Matthew 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.23)."

APPLICATION.

1. Look well to your own character, as before God.

It is not by your outward actions merely that you will be judged at the last day, but by the dispositions and habits of your mind. He who stands high in his own estimation will be proportionably low in God's esteem; while the lowly will be approved of God, in proportion as he is abased in his own eyes, [Luke 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.11).

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican sufficiently evinces this. The one had made great attainments in religion, and was free from everything that could be a subject of self-reproach. While the other had shown no attention whatever to religion, and had probably committed many great evils. Yet the one, being penitent, was accepted; and the other, being unhumbled, was dismissed with utter disapprobation and abhorrence.

I would, therefore, particularly entreat you to examine to which of the two, in the habit of your mind, you are like. And I would have you also carefully to distinguish between the spirit of a creature and the feelings of a sinner; for there are many who have a consciousness of their insignificance as creatures, while they have very little sense of their guiltiness as sinners; and hence are looking for acceptance through their own works, instead of relying simply and altogether upon the Lord Jesus Christ. I say again: This will enter deeply into God's estimate of your character at the last day; and, therefore, it must form a most essential part of your inquiry into your own state at this time.

2. Expect that God's dealings with you will be in perfect accordance with your character.

To all eternity will the declaration in my text be fulfilled. There will be no bounds to "the respect that shall be paid to the lowly" at the day of judgment. They shall be owned by that Savior in whom they had believed; and be placed on his right hand, as distinguished monuments of his favor! To Heaven itself also shall they be exalted, as heirs of the Savior's kingdom, and as partners of his throne forever and ever!

On the other hand, most tremendous will be the aspect of the Savior's countenance towards the proud, impenitent, and unhumbled sinners. They have despised him, and all the wonders of his love; and now, they themselves shall be banished from his presence with righteous scorn and contempt. They were too good in their own estimation to flee to him for mercy; and now they shall have no part in his salvation, nor any other doom than what their own works have merited. Would to God that the despisers of the Gospel salvation would consider this, before it is too late! The great and glorious "God wills not the death of any sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness, and live;" nor is there a creature in the universe whom he would not most gladly receive to mercy. But he will never depart from what he has spoken, that "whoever covers his sins shall not prosper; but that he who confesses and forsakes them, shall have mercy."

#733

GOD'S CARE OF HIS PEOPLE

**[Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8)**

"The Lord will perfect that which concerns me!"

The deeper doctrines of our holy religion, if made a matter of controversy and disputation, are very unprofitable. But, as experienced in the soul, they are a source of the richest consolation.

David, under the persecutions of Saul, stood in need of consolation; and he found it in the consideration of God's power and faithfulness. He was at this time in great trouble. But, in the full confidence that God would take care of him, he said, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will revive me; you shall stretch forth your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerns me."

Let us, for our own improvement of these words, consider:

I. The **confidence** here expressed.

Let us notice it,

1. In reference to **David**.

In their primary sense, the words refer to David's final establishment on the throne of Israel. But the whole Psalm shows that he had a further view to his spiritual and eternal interests.

In reference to his temporal advancement, his confidence was well-founded. God had promised to him the throne of Israel. The only question, therefore, for him to settle in his own mind, was whether God was able to effect his promised mercy. But here he could have no doubt. True it was, that Saul labored with all his might for his destruction; but it was not possible for man to thwart the purposes of the Almighty; and therefore, relying on the power and faithfulness of Jehovah, he dismissed all fear, and assured himself of a happy and successful outcome to his afflictions.

In reference to his eternal welfare, it was equally just. God had "made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure, [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)." This covenant comprehended everything for body and for soul, for time and for eternity. Could it be supposed that God should ever violate his own engagements, or be incapacitated through the power or subtlety of men or devils for the fulfillment of them? In spite of all the efforts of Saul, and all the devices of the wicked one, they had been accomplished hitherto; and there was no reason to fear that "one jot or tittle of his Word should ever fail."

2. In reference to **ourselves**.

We have the same difficulties to contend with as David. We have not indeed a human enemy, pursuing us unto death; but we have a more formidable enemy, even "Satan, who, as a roaring lion, goes about, seeking," by every means within his power, "to devour us! [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8)." Thousands are in league with him on every side; and within our own bosoms there are innumerable enemies, who are ready to betray us. According to human appearances, our escape is impossible. But we may, notwithstanding all, possess the fullest confidence of a triumphant outcome.

Our grounds of confidence, also, are the same as his. The covenant of grace is made with us, and with the Lord Jesus Christ in our behalf. In that covenant, God undertakes for us, as well as for himself; he engages that "he will not depart from us to do us good; and that he will put his fear in our hearts, that we may not depart from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)."

Now we may well say, "If God is for us—then who can be against us?" That he should change, is impossible; for "He is a God who does not changes! [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6)." And, because we are apt to doubt his veracity, he has confirmed his promise with an oath, "that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us, [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18)." On these grounds, therefore, we may with the holy Apostle, "be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Christ! [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)."

But let us further mark,

II. The conduct to which confidence in God should lead us.

It should lead us to precisely the same spirit as David manifested; with a view to which, I would say:

1. Look for progress in the Divine life.

David looked to God to "perfect all that concerned him." So should we, also, "go on unto perfection." We should never count ourselves to have attained, as long as anything remains to be attained. Whatever progress we may have already made, we should "forget the things which are behind, and reach forth unto that which is before, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus! [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14)."

2. Let your dependence be on God alone.

It was to God alone that David looked for the "perfecting" of all his concerns. And to God alone must you look. No dependence whatever must be placed on your own wisdom or strength. It is "God who has wrought all your works in you" hitherto, [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12); and he who has been "the Author, must also be the Finisher! [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." "The same hand as laid the foundation of the good work, must bring forth the top-stone, that Grace, grace, may be ascribed to it," forever and ever! [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.9).

3. Blend your confidence in God with a reverential fear of God.

The confidence which David expressed did not supersede the necessity of holy fear. On the contrary, at the very moment that he so expressed it, he cried, "Do not forsake the work of your own hands! verse 8." It was thus with the Apostle Paul. No man ever had stronger confidence in God than he; yet "he kept his body under control, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)."

Extremely important do I consider this suggestion. For, among those who express this confidence in God, many think themselves at liberty to relax their vigilance; taking for granted, that God will keep them, whether they labor to "keep themselves, Jude verse 21." or not.

But this is an abuse, and a very fatal abuse, of the doctrines of grace. The assistance promised us by God, is intended to encourage, not to supersede, our own endeavors; as Paul has said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, to will and to do of his good pleasure, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13)." To every one among you, then, whatever his attainments are, I say, "Do not be high-minded, but fear! [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20);" for "blessed is the man that fears always, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14)." While you say with David, "The Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me;" be sure to add, "My prayer shall be unto the God of my life! [Psalm 42:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.8)."

4. Unite with reverential fear of God, a firm unshaken confidence in God.

As arduous as David's circumstances were, he entertained no doubt respecting their final outcome. He looked to "God, as performing all things for him, [Psalm 57:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.2)," and was satisfied.

Now, in like manner, I would have you "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God." Treasure up in your minds "his exceeding great and precious promises," and expect the accomplishment of them all to your souls. He has said, that "he will never leave you; never, never forsake you, [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5);" and you may rest assured that he will fulfill his Word; for "He is faithful who has promised, [Hebrews 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23)." "Cast, then, your care altogether upon him, [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7);" and "commit the keeping of your souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19)."

#734

THE OMNIPRESENCE AND OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

**[Psalm 139:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.1-12)**

"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you!"

David was a man bitterly persecuted and greatly calumniated. Nothing could exceed the acrimony with which Saul pursued him to take away his life. But David had the comfort of a good conscience; and he often appealed to the heart-searching God to attest his innocence of those crimes that were laid to his charge. It is probable that such were his circumstances when he composed this Psalm; and that, when traduced by men, he consoled himself with the reflection, that every thought of his heart was fully known to God. The opinions are delivered in an immediate address to God himself; and they are such as ought to be deeply impressed on every mind.

Let us in our comment on this passage consider,

I. The truths here acknowledged.

David asserts in a most solemn manner the OMNIPRESENCE of God.

Certain it is, that God is everywhere present. "If we should go up to Heaven, he is there; or down to the grave or the abodes of departed spirits, he is there." There is no point of space where he is not, or where he is not as wholly and entirely present as in Heaven itself. "The heavens cannot contain him."

He himself puts the question to every man, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? says the Lord. Do not I fill Heaven and earth? says the Lord, [Jeremiah 23:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.23-24)." It is in vain therefore for us to think of hiding ourselves from him, since in every place "You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me," that it is not possible for us to escape. He is present with us, "to lead us," if we seek his guidance; or "to hold us," if we would attempt to run from him.

Together with the omnipresence of God, the Psalmist further asserts also his OMNISCIENCE.

The eyes of God are continually upon the ways of men. What men know only by searching, God knows by a single glance of his eye, and as perfectly, as if he had "searched" with the utmost care and diligence into the minutest parts and circumstances of every transaction. Even the thoughts, yes, and every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts, are open to him, together with the whole frame and habit of our minds.

Are we retiring to rest, or lying upon our bed, or rising from thence after our night's repose? God knows precisely in what state we are. He sees whether we are calling our ways to remembrance, and humbling ourselves before him, and imploring mercy at his hands, together with grace that we may serve him more acceptably; or whether our minds are running out after earthly objects, and occupied about the things of time and sense.

Do we go forth to our respective callings? God sees by what motives we are actuated, and by what principles we are governed. Whatever fraud we may practice in our dealings with men, or whatever artifice we may use to promote our own interests—he is privy to it.

On the other hand, whatever dispositions we may exercise, or actions we may perform, for the glory of his name—he beholds them also. We may be so unostentatious, that even our right hand may not know what our left hand does; but he knows it, and marks it with his special favor.

So likewise in the public assemblies of his people—he sees whether we are humble, fervent, and believing; or whether we have a mere form of godliness, without the power of it. In a word, wherever we are, in public or in private, he knows infinitely more of us than the best-instructed Christian in the universe can know of himself. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; we cannot attain unto it."

As for light or darkness, it makes no difference to him, "the night and the day to him are both alike." "All things" without exception, even the most hidden recesses of the heart, "are naked and open before him;" just as the inmost parts of the sacrifices, when cut down the back-bone, were to the priest appointed to inspect them, [Hebrews 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12-13). See also [Jeremiah 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 16.17) and [Job 34:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.22).

These are solemn truths; and the importance of them will forcibly appear, while we suggest,

II. Some reflections naturally arising from God's omnipresence and omniscience.

On this subject we might multiply reflections without end, seeing that there is not any part of a Christian's experience which is not most intimately connected with it. But we will confine ourselves to two, namely,

1. That many, however high they may be in their own estimation, will be found most awfully to have deceived themselves in the last day.

Among the foremost of these are the ungodly and profane. These, with an atheistical contempt of God, go on in their own way, saying, "Tush, God shall not see, neither shall the Almighty regard it!" "How does God know? Can he judge through dark clouds? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he sees not! [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14). [Psalm 73:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.11)."

But how will they be surprised in the day of judgment, to find, that not one single act, word, or thought of their whole lives had escaped the notice of God! They, if no human eye beheld them, pursued their sinful pleasures without fear; little thinking Who was present . . .  
beholding their every act,  
hearing their every word,  
noting their every thought!

Had but a child been present, they could not have proceeded with such indifference; but they had no regard for Jehovah's presence, any more than if he had been, like the heathen gods—unknowing, unconscious, unconcerned.

Truly, it is a fearful account which they will have to give, when they shall see the long catalogue of their sins written with unerring accuracy, and brought forward against them as the ground of their eternal condemnation.

Next to these are the proud formalists, who, because they have never run to any excess of riot, applaud themselves as righteous and secure of the Divine favor. But while they boast of their negative righteousness and their performance of some external duties, and look with contempt upon those who have been less moral than themselves—little do they think in what a different light they are viewed by "God, who knows their hearts; in whose sight that which is highly esteemed among men is frequently an utter abomination! [Luke 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.15)."

Very different is the standard by which he estimates them, from that by which they estimate themselves! The things for which he looks are, a tenderness of spirit, a lowliness of mind, a brokenness of heart, a deep self-loathing and self-abhorrence; not one atom of which has he ever seen in these self-applauding Pharisees!

Say, you formal moralist, when did the heart-searching God ever see you weeping for your sins, and smiting on your bosom, like the repenting publican, and fleeing to Christ as the manslayer fled to the city of refuge? When did he ever hear you adoring and magnifying him for the exceeding riches of his grace in Christ Jesus? Know that He can discern between true and false religion, whether you can or not; and that it is "not he who commends himself who shall be approved in the judgment, but he whom the Lord commends."

But of all self-deceiving people, there are none who have so much reason to tremble at the idea of God's omniscience as the false and hypocritical professor. True, if there were ten thousand of this complexion present, not one would apply the title to himself, or suppose himself to be comprehended under this heading. Yet are there many such in the Church of God; many, whose religion consists in hearing and talking about the Gospel, rather than in exercising the spirit which it inculcates. If a zeal about certain tenets, or running to hear sermons, or putting themselves forward in religious meetings, or sitting in judgment upon others who are not of their party—if this were true religion, they would be very eminent! But if true religion consists:  
in humility of mind,  
in meekness and lowliness of heart,  
in patience and forbearance towards those who differ from them,  
in a diligent attention to the duties of their place and station,  
and in a secret walk with God—they will be found most awfully lacking in them all.

Alas! the religion of many professors makes them not a whit more amiable and lovely in their dispositions and habits, than if they had never heard of "the example of Christ!" On the contrary, their pride, and conceit, and forwardness, and presumption, render them ten-fold more disgusting both to God and man, than if they made no profession of religion at all!

When such people come into the presence of their God at the last day, what testimony will they receive from the heart-searching God but this, that "they had a name to live, and were dead;" and that while "they said that they were Jews, they lied, and were in reality of the synagogue of Satan!" Yes, "their excellency may mount up to the heavens; but they shall perish like their own dung; and they that have seen them shall with surprise and grief exclaim, Where are they? [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.4-7)."

The confidence which any of these classes may profess, only binds upon them the more strongly the fetters they have forged for themselves, and ensures more certainly their everlasting ruin! [Proverbs 21:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.2) and [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.21).

2. That many who are low in the estimation both of themselves and others, shall receive at last from God himself a glorious testimony in their behalf.

Many are of the Lord's "hidden ones," who have been kept back by diffidence or other circumstances from joining themselves to the Lord's people in an open and ostensible way, who yet shall receive from God the strongest tokens of his approbation. They perhaps envied the gifts and talents of some more forward professors, and thought themselves unworthy to join in their society; but God, who knew their hearts, said of them, "I know your poverty—but you are rich." He heard the sighs and groans which they uttered from day to day under a sense of their own unworthiness. He treasured up in his vial the tears they shed from a loathing of themselves, and an admiration of their God. He saw how precious the Lord Jesus Christ was to their souls, as their hope, their peace, their strength, their all. They were of no account perhaps among their fellow-Christians; but they were greatly beloved of their God. The more abased they were in their own eyes because of their sinfulness, the more exalted they were in God's eyes. He saw that in their prayers, their fastings, their alms, they sought not glory from men; and therefore "he in the last day will reward them openly." He will say of them in that day, "I saw you under the fig-tree;" "if your talent was small, you made a good improvement of it;" you thought that in "giving your mite to the sanctuary," you had done nothing; but I testify for you, that "it was more in my sight than all that the rich gave out of their abundance."

Yes, Beloved, as you desire to serve and honor God, so will God accept and bless you, "He will bring to light the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man, who was of no account in his own eyes, have praise of God."

If then, brethren, you are overlooked, or even calumniated and traduced by men, lay it not to heart, but seek to approve yourselves to the heart-searching God. Let man have his day, knowing assuredly that God will have his also, [1 Corinthians 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3-4), and that "his judgment will be according to truth."

APPLICATION.

Let all now show what regard they have for God. Let all retire, with a consciousness that God sees them; let them go to their secret chamber, and there implore mercy from him for their past neglect of his presence, and grace that they may henceforth be enabled to "set him always before them," and to "walk in his fear all the day long."

#735

A CHRISTIAN'S DELIGHT IN GOD

**[Psalm 139:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.17-18)**

"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you!"

These words will admit of a twofold interpretation. They may be considered as referring to the thoughts which God had entertained in his bosom respecting David, or to those which David entertained respecting God.

If we take them in the former sense, the import of them is to this effect; 'It is impossible for me ever to enumerate the mercies which, in your eternal counsels, you have prepared for me, and which I am daily receiving at your hands; and if I would attempt to number them through the whole day, I would make so little progress, that in the following morning I should have all my work to do again.' In this view, they agree with what the inspired penman says in another Psalm, "Many, O Lord my God, are your wonderful works which you have done, and your thoughts which are to us; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered! [Psalm 40:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.5)."

If we take them in the latter sense, their meaning is, 'My delight in contemplating all your glorious perfections, and all the wonders of your love, O my God, is inexpressible; it is my sweet employment day and night, insomuch that my first waking thoughts ever recur to you.' In this sense they accord with what he says in the 104th Psalm, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord! [Psalm 104:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 104.33-34)."

It is to this latter sense that I rather incline; because there is a remarkable coincidence between the general subject of the 104th Psalm with that which is before us, (both of them speaking altogether of God as the Creator and Governor of the world,) and because the expressions of delight in God, in both the Psalms, stand in immediate connection with his aversion to sinners, whom, for their opposition to God, he consigns over to merited disgrace and punishment. Compare [Psalm 104:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 104.34-35) with [Psalm 139:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.18-19).

But in either case, it is clear that David found his happiness in contemplating God; and whether we extend his views to the wonders of God's love in general, or confine them to those which had been given personally to himself, they will equally afford me occasion to show you the nature and blessedness of Christian experience.

Let us consider:

I. The nature of Christian experience.

The world at large have no conception of delighting in God; they rather say to God in their hearts, "Depart from us; we do not desire the knowledge of your ways! [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14)." And they endeavor to put him far from them; for they will not entertain him in all, or any of their thoughts, [Psalm 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4).

Nor has the hypocritical professor of religion any real delight in God; for Job says of him, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God? [Job 27:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.8); [Job 27:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.10)."

But of the true Christian this is a very leading feature, [Psalm 37:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.4). [Isaiah 58:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.14).

1. The true Christian delights in **the contemplation of God**.

His mind soars upwards to God; who is, as it were, ever present to his view.

In all the works of Creation,  
in all the dispensations of Providence,  
and in all the wonders of Redemption,  
he sees the glory and excellency of his God. He can behold nothing, he can think of nothing, which does not set God before him in some of his glorious perfections. The wisdom, the power, the goodness, the patience, the forbearance, the love, the mercy of his God, pass in review before his eyes, and call forth his devoutest acknowledgments; and the display of these, in his own personal experience, calls forth in him such admiring thoughts as no language can adequately express.

But it will be remembered, that this Psalm speaks particularly of the omnipresence and omniscience of God; and these attributes, which are so terrible to the ungodly, and of which they would, if possible, divest him, are to the true Christian a source of exquisite delight.

Wherever he goes, he sees God at his right hand . . .  
 ready to direct him in all his ways,  
 ready to support him in all his exertions,  
 ready to preserve him in every danger!

In many instances:  
his views are misapprehended,  
his actions misinterpreted, and  
his character is traduced.

But he comforts himself in the thought that God knows his heart, and is acquainted with every motion there; and that, whether God interposes or not to vindicate his character in this world, he will do it in the world to come; and that, if man have his day, God also will have his! See 1 Corinthians 4:3-4.

True, he is conscious that God sees his infirmities; but he also knows that God can distinguish what man cannot so easily discern, the difference between unallowed infirmities and willful sins; and that if he beholds our weaknesses, he is also acquainted with our sighs, our tears, our groans—every one of which attests the desire of our hearts, even where there has been too evident a failure in our attainments.

2. The true Christian delights in **communion with God**.

These attributes of God, which are the subjects of the Christian's contemplation, are also the subjects of his devoutest praise. "Truly, his fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ."

Throughout the day "he walks with God," as Enoch did, communing with him, and committing to him his every concern. He would not willingly take a step but in entire dependence upon God. Not in his stated devotions only does he call upon God, but in ten thousand prayers through the day, according as circumstances arise to call them forth. In the whole habit of his mind "he dwells in God;" as "God also, by the constant communications of his grace, dwells in him."

This mutual indwelling of God in his people, and his people in him, is frequently spoken of in the Holy Scriptures, [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); and it well conveys the idea of that rest in God which every true believer enjoys, and of that familiar fellowship, if I may so express myself, which exists between his God and him.

But the expression in my text deserves a more particular consideration, "When I awake, I am still with you." This implies all that we have before spoken; namely, that in his meditations and prayers he was with God through the day; and it goes further to remark that such was the entire rest of his soul in God, that, with the early dawn, as soon as he awoke, his very first thoughts rose to God, who was the one object of all his desires, and the one source of all his happiness.

Now this is, perhaps, as striking a feature in the Christian's experience as any that can be named. During the day, a Christian may have much to occupy his mind, and much to engage a great intensity of thought; at such seasons, therefore, the contemplation of God, and of communion with him, may be in appearance suspended; but, as the needle of a compass, which, by force, or superior attraction, has been diverted for a while from its proper rest, as soon as it is at liberty to resume its usual position, shows to all its faithful subjection to the polar influence. In the same way, does the soul of a Christian, as soon as it is relieved from the pressure of contingent circumstances, return to God, as its proper, its chosen, and its only rest. And I wish you all, my brethren, to be observant of yourselves in this particular; and never to think that you have attained the full measure of communion with God, until you can say, "When I awake, I am still with you!"

Having described the nature of Christian experience, I shall need but few words to show,

II. The blessedness of delighting in God.

The Psalmist strongly marks this, "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God!" Whether we understand him as speaking of God's thoughts of him, or of his thoughts of God—it is evident that the preciousness of them was felt in his own soul.

1. Delighting in God fills the Christian's soul with a sense of its obligations.

The ungodly world loses much, while they overlook the hand from whence their blessings flow! Truly, in their richest enjoyments, they have little perception of them, wherein they are not equaled by the beasts themselves. It is the taste of God's love in them which gives to every one of them its highest zest. I hesitate not to say, that Lazarus, in the midst of his utter destitution, had, in the crumbs with which he was sustained, a sublimer gratification, than the Rich Man ever knew in all the pomp and delicacies with which he was surrounded! In truth, the discovery of God in everything, gives to the Christian a continual feast, and furnishes him with incessant occasions of sincere joy! Inanimate things proclaim unwittingly the honor of their God; but the believer sounds it forth continually with the devoutest acclamations. "All your works praise you," says the Psalmist, "but your saints bless you!"

2. Delighting in God fills the Christian's soul with a persuasion of its security.

Those who know not God are at a loss where to flee, or what to do, in any great emergency. But the Christian is assured that "God is at his right hand, and that therefore he can never be moved." He sees "God as a wall of fire round about him;" not a wall only, that might possibly be scaled, but "a wall of fire," that will devour any who shall dare to assail us! "God's very name is," to the Christian, "a strong tower," to which he runs, and is safe. He sees "chariots of fire and horses of fire all around him;" and in perfect confidence he says, "If God is for me—then who can be against me?"

Say, whether such a one be not happy? Hear his triumphant strains, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us 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)." If such a one is not happy, where shall happiness be found on earth?

With an anticipation and foretaste of its eternal bliss.

Such views of God, and such communion with him, what are they, but the very beginnings of Heaven upon earth? The believer who can say "It is thus that I am with my God in this world," may add, with an emphasis peculiar to himself, "When I awake in the eternal world, I shall be still with you!" Changing my place indeed, but neither my company nor my employment.

ADDRESS.

Beloved brethren, has God from all eternity occupied his thoughts about you, and will not you turn your thoughts to him? Delay not.

I will not say: Do not rob God of his glory.

I will rather say: Do not rob yourselves of happiness.

You cannot doubt the felicity of those who thus contemplate and enjoy their God. O, do not let the vanities of time and sense stand in competition with him! Look at the worst that befalls a Christian, and you shall find him blessed in the midst of all.

See him "poor in spirit;"  
see him "mourning and weeping;"  
see him "persecuted for righteousness' sake."  
  
In every state he is pronounced "blessed," "blessed," "blessed!"

On the other hand, tell me where you will find the worldling blessed under any circumstances whatever. No, "in the fullness of his sufficiency, he is in straits."

Know for a certainty, that he alone is, or ever shall be, blessed, whom God, the Judge of the living and the dead, shall pronounce so! He alone is truly blessed, who has God . . .  
for his God,  
for his portion,  
for "his eternal great reward!"

#736

THE DIFFICULTY OF KNOWING OUR OWN STATE

**[Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)**

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life!"

The attributes of God are all infinitely glorious; but, like the cloud of fire, they have a different aspect towards the friends, and the enemies of God. To the ungodly, the attributes of God are dark and terrible; but to the godly, they are full of light and comfort, [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11). His omniscience in particular is a ground both of joy and terror; in this light David speaks of it in the Psalm before us. He represents this attribute in striking colors, verse 1-12; he declares that the consideration of it was delightful to him, verse 17, 18; but the prospect it afforded him with respect to the wicked was extremely melancholy, verse 19. Returning however to his own immediate concerns, he improves this attribute to his own spiritual advantage, verse 23, 24.

From these words we may notice,

I. The danger of indulging in any secret sin.

There is no man who is perfectly free from sin, [1 Kings 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.46); but no real Christian will knowingly harbor sin. The indulging of it could not consist with his salvation. This is strongly intimated in the text. He intimates that if there were any wicked way in him, he could not be walking in the way everlasting. It is also expressly declared in other parts of Scripture.

It is said that a regenerate person cannot indulge sin, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9).

Allowed sin characterizes those who are of the devil, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8).

Allowed sin entirely prevents the acceptance of our prayers, [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18).

Allowed sin entails on a person everlasting destruction, [Matthew 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.19).

Our Lord repeatedly urges this as a reason for mortifying every sin, however pleasant or profitable it is! [Matthew 5:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.29-30).

Nor ought this to be esteemed "a hard saying".

The harboring of any sin is a contempt of God's authority, [James 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10-11).

Allowed sin defeats the end of Christ's incarnation and death, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8).

Allowed sin argues an entire lack of sincerity, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47).

Allowed sin therefore justly brings the curse of God upon us, [Jeremiah 48:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 48.10).

There is one thing indeed which renders the consideration of this extremely solemn, namely:

II. The difficulty of discerning whether we have any **allowed**sin in us or not.

The rule of our duty is clear enough; but it is by no means easy to determine how far our experience corresponds with it. This is evidently implied in the solicitude which David expresses for divine aid and direction. It may be confirmed also by many Scripture examples.

What ignorance of his own heart did Hazael discover? [2 Kings 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 8.13).

James and John little thought by what spirit they were actuated! [Luke 9:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.55).

Nor was Peter aware of his own instability, [Matthew 26:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.35).

Paul himself could not venture positively to determine the extent of his own innocence, [1 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.4).

God has declared that no one can attain a perfect knowledge of his own heart! "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9)."

Many reasons might be assigned for this difficulty.

The very best of our actions are blended with sin. Self-love tempts us to view them in too favorable a light; we put fine names on our bosom-sins. Hence it is hard to discern the exact quality of our actions.

To evince however that there is one way of judging aright, we shall proceed to show,

III. The means we should use for the ascertaining of it.

Self-examination is a duty inculcated in Scripture, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5). It is necessary for the attaining of self-knowledge. The Christian therefore can adopt the words of Asaph in [Psalm 77:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.6). But he does not rest satisfied with his own exertions.

He is aware of . . .  
"the deceitfulness of sin,"  
the treachery of his own heart,  
and "the evils schemes of Satan."

Though he rejoices in the testimony of his own conscience, he dares not confide in it too much, [Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26).

He cries to God to "search and try him".

He remembers whose prerogative it is to search the heart, [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.10).

He reads the Word that God may search him with it [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12).

He regards conscience as God's viceregent, [Proverbs 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.27).

He looks up for the Spirit's aid and influence, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26).

In this way he prays, like David, frequently, and with fervor.

He commits himself to the divine guidance and direction.

He knows he shall err if God does not "lead" him; he trusts in the promises which God has given him in his Word, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9). [Proverbs 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.6).

In this way he attains abiding peace and confidence, [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7).

APPLICATION.

Let us all begin the work of self-examination.

Let us call in the divine aid with importunate supplications.

Let us inquire whether there is any sin which we habitually indulge, or some duty which we neglect?

Let us especially take notice of our "thoughts".

Let us not think that inadvertence can excuse our sins, while we neglect the means of discovering them, [Leviticus 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.17).

Let us tremble lest, through the indulgence of one sin, our religion proves vain at last, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26).

Let us not walk in a way which shall serve merely for a present show, but a way that shall be of "everlasting" benefit.

#737

LIBERTY DESIRED

**[Psalm 142:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 142.7)**

"Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name!"

Great are the changes which, from time to time, we observe in the material world; namely, from darkness to light, from barrenness to fertility, from death to life.

Such likewise take place in the spiritual world; for men, by the Gospel, are "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

Nor is this spiritual change less visible than the other. There are signs whereby we may "know that we have passed from death unto life," and been "translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son."

When David penned the Psalm before us, he was hidden in a cave, and was every moment in danger of being discovered and destroyed by his potent enemy, King Saul. But there was also a spiritual bondage to which he was reduced by means of the persecutions he endured; and hence he offers the petition in my text, "Bring my soul out of prison!" And for what end did he desire this deliverance? Was it merely on account of the relief which it would afford to him? No; he had higher and nobler feelings; and was actuated by a concern for God's honor far more than by any personal consideration whatever.

That I may mark this peculiarity in David's experience, I will show,

I. Under what circumstances we may well offer this petition.

It is not needful that we should be immured in a dungeon, or shut up in a cave, from whence there seems to be no way of escape.

1. We may offer this petition under the pressure of unpardoned guilt.

Truly, a soul under the dread of God's everlasting wrath is in a state of sore bondage. All in an unforgiven state are said to be "shut up under sin, [Romans 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.32);" and, in fact, there are no bonds so painful as those which sin has forged for a guilty conscience. Hear David, under a sense of guilt, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer, [Psalm 32:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.3-4). See also [Psalm 40:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.11-12)."

Indeed, whoever has felt the burden of sin, and how impossible it is for any but God to pardon it, will pant for "the glorious liberty of the children of God," and rejoice from his inmost soul in that promise, that "the Son, even the Lord Jesus Christ, will make us free, [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32); [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36)."

2. We may offer this petition under those various **trials** to which, as Christians, we are exposed.

All Christians are more or less under persecution from man. And what bondage that brings, the Psalm before us will abundantly declare. In truth, the embarrassment occasioned to children by their ungodly parents, to servants by their oppressive masters, and to subjects by persecuting magistrates, exceeds all that can be conceived; for, who can draw the precise line between our duty to God and to man, when their conflicting orders seem to render a resistance to the one or to the other of these governors unavoidable? And to what sad alternatives have the people of God been often brought, through the enactment of unrighteous laws!

Under temptation from Satan, too, are multitudes reduced to sad extremities! Behold the Apostle Paul, when under the buffetings of Satan; with what repeated cries he pleads with God for deliverance, [2 Corinthians 12:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-8). Even our blessed Lord himself was so harassed by this wicked adversary, that he scarcely knew what to say, or what to do, "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)." And who can tell what thousands have suffered through the devices of this great adversary, and from the fiery darts with which he has pierced their souls! [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11); [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16).

Nor must I omit to mention the yet sorer bondage which is sometimes experienced through desertion from God. For wise and gracious reasons, God is sometimes pleased to hide his face from his people, and for a season to appear to them as an enemy and an avenger. Hear the complaint of Heman, in the 88th Psalm, "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. Lord, why do you cast off my soul? why do you hide your face from me? I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer your terrors, I am distracted. Your fierce wrath goes over me; Your terrors have cut me off! [Psalm 88:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.3); [Psalm 88:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.6-7); [Psalm 88:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14-16)."

But hear our blessed Lord himself, from whom all that man could inflict drew no complaint; yet, in the hour of desertion from his heavenly Father, he poured forth this bitter cry, "My God! my God! why have you forsaken me! [Matthew 27:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.46)."

And so it is with many a pious soul, when "the arrows of the Almighty are within them, the poison whereof drinks up their spirit; and when the terrors of God do set themselves in array against them [Job 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.4)."

In all these instances, then, the afflicted soul may well pour forth the petition in my text, "Bring my soul out of prison!"

Yet let me show you:

II. What, in offering this petition, should be the chief object of our desire.

I am far from saying that deliverance is not to be desired for its own sake; for God himself condescends to acknowledge, that, whatever be the ultimate design of his chastisements, "affliction is not at the present joyous, but grievous, [Hebrews 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.11);" and to require man to be so divested of all personal feeling as not to desire ease and freedom for their own sake, is, in my apprehension, an unscriptural refinement.

But, beyond a doubt, we should, in all our desires, have a higher object in view, even as our Lord had when praying for the removal of the bitter cup, yes, and "praying for it with strong crying and tears! [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7);" he was content to drink it, that God's will might be done, and his name be glorified, [Matthew 26:38-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.38-44). Thus David in my text prays, "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name!" This was uppermost in his mind, even when his life was in the utmost jeopardy; and this must always be the most influential principle in our minds.

1. This frame of mind itself is most desirable.

A man possessing a spirit of gratitude and praise cannot but be happy. Under the greatest sufferings, it will alleviate our pain, and enable us to "rejoice under the heaviest tribulations." We see Paul and Silas, when immured in a prison, with their feet fastened in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges, singing praises to God at midnight; and who, I ask, were the happier, they, or their ungodly persecutors? We wonder not, then, that David, under all his troubles, laid the chief stress on this, as the ground on which he sought deliverance, "O LORD, see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death, that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation!

[Psalm 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.13-14)."

2. It is that frame by which we most glorify our God.

This frame of mind shows the power and efficacy of divine grace. A man whose soul is thus made free, whatever is the bondage in which his body is held, is "free indeed." This is the state of mind which is pre-eminently characteristic of the true Christian, who "neither lives to himself, nor dies to himself; but living, lives unto the Lord; and dying, dies unto the Lord; that, whether living or dying, he may be the Lord's! [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8)."

In a word, then only do we honor our profession aright, when our one great concern is, "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ! [1 Peter 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.11)."

3. It is that frame of mind by which we are best prepared for Heaven.

Heaven is a state of incessant praise! The heavenly hosts "rest not day nor night from pouring forth their acclamations and hosannahs to God and to the Lamb!" And here, we are tuning our harps, and beginning to learn their song. Now, the very end for which God sends us affliction is to purge away our dross, and to prepare us for Heaven; and therefore we then best answer his design in afflicting us, when we take occasion from our troubles to abound more and more in thanksgiving to our God!

In every view, then, the desire expressed by David, in our text, was that which we ought most to cherish, as most worthy of our holy profession; as being most excellent in itself, most honorable to God, and most conducive to our eternal happiness.

APPLICATION.

1. Be thankful that you are where you may offer this petition, with a certainty that it shall be answered.

We read of "spirits in prison," to whom deliverance can never come, 1 Peter 3:19. But you, beloved, are "prisoners of hope," to whom mercy may be accorded, not only "double" the amount of all your desert of punishment, but "double" the amount of all your most sanguine expectations, [Zechariah 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.12). Your blessed Savior came on purpose to deliver you, [Isaiah 42:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.7); [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3); and if only you cry to him, "he will save your souls with a great deliverance."

2. If you have experienced deliverance, be sure you improve it for the honor of your God.

When our Lord healed the cripple, he said to him, "Behold, you are made whole! Go and sin no more." So, if you are brought forth from bondage of any kind, take care not to "use your liberty as a cloak of licentiousness, but as the servants of God, [1 Peter 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.16)," that you may run with more enlargement the way of his commandments.

#738

ENTER NOT INTO JUDGMENT WITH YOUR SERVANT

**[Psalm 143:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.2)**

"Enter not into judgment with your servant; for in your sight shall no man living be justified!"

Trials and persecutions are sometimes permitted by God, for the purpose of honoring his people, and advancing his work in their souls; and may justly be regarded by them as a gift from God, bestowed on them for Christ's sake for their eternal good, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29). But under some circumstances, trials may be viewed rather as judgments from God on account of some iniquity which they have committed.

In this light must we consider all the troubles which arose to David in his own family, after his transgression in the matter of Uriah. The evil was unmerited as far as related to the people who inflicted it; but it was received from God as a chastisement, under which it befit him to humble himself in dust and ashes. We are not indeed certain at what time David wrote this Psalm, whether when he was suffering under Saul, or when his own son Absalom had driven him from his throne. We are rather inclined to think it was at the latter period, because that affliction was so decidedly a punishment for his former sins, having been predicted by Nathan in that view. But, whatever were the circumstances under which the Psalm was written, David viewed them as judgments from God which he deprecated; while, as to the immediate occasion, he appealed to God that he did not merit such treatment at the hands of man. In his appeal to God, he had called upon him "in faithfulness and in righteousness to hear and answer him;" but it was only in reference to the evils imputed to him by man that he dared thus to speak; before God he knew he deserved all that could be inflicted on him; and therefore he implored mercy at his hands, as one self-convicted and self-condemned, "Enter not into judgment with your servant; for in your sight shall no man living be justified!"

These words we shall consider in a two-fold point of view:

I. As containing principles for our instruction.

It is obvious that in this address of David to Jehovah, the following truths are declared;

1. That all men are sinners before God.

David speaks of "every living man." And this is the universal testimony of Scripture, that "there is none righteous, no, not one;" that "in many things we all offend;" that "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." The man who denies this, is said to be "a self-deceiver," and to "make God himself a liar! [1 John 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.8); [1 John 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.10)."

Job, though not possessing the Mosaic writings, had a deep insight into this truth. He saw that it was the necessary consequence of the fall of Adam; for that our first parents being impure, nothing but what was impure could proceed from them, [Job 15:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.14-16); [Job 25:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 25.4-6). Indeed it was by no ordinary method that Job was brought to the knowledge of this truth. A vision was given to him for this express purpose, and such a vision as made "his very hairs to stand upright," and "every bone of his body to shake, [Job 4:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.12-19)."

In the same way, a discovery of the corruption of our hearts would produce the same effect on us, yes, and would drive us utterly to despair, if some view of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus were not given to us at the same time. This then is the first principle avowed in the passage before us, "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)."

2. That all, as sinners, are liable to God's heavy displeasure.

To man in Paradise it was said, "In the day that you eat of the forbidden tree you shall surely die!" From that time to this "the wages of sin have been death." The whole Gospel assumes this as an acknowledged truth; for, if all were not under the displeasure of God—then all did not need a Savior, nor was Christ an atoning sacrifice for their sins.

But if all are sinners, then are all under a sentence of death; since it is written, "Cursed is every one who continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them;" and again, "The soul that sins, it shall surely die." Paul, when ignorant of God's law, thought himself alive; but, when instructed in it, perceived himself to be dead, even as others, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9).

3. That all must look for some other way of justification, than by any works of their own.

Justification necessarily implies that a person is not considered as guilty in the sight of God. But all being guilty, they are condemned as sinners; and consequently cannot at the same time be justified as righteous. But there is a righteousness provided for sinners, in, and through, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is on that very account called, "The Lord our righteousness." In him the vilest of the human race "may be justified, and may glory, [Isaiah 45:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.25)." But in any other way not even the Apostles themselves could be justified, [Galatians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.16); Every man therefore that would find acceptance with God in the last day, must seek "to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)."

But while we view the text as establishing the fundamental principles of the Gospel, let us view it also,

II. As exhibiting a pattern for our imitation.

Who among us does not need to realize the severity of God's justice, precisely as David does? Let us examine,

1. The general tenor of our past lives.

From our youth up, what have we been, and what have we done?

Has it been the one object of our lives to answer the great end of our creation—to glorify God?

Have we duly estimated and sought the blessings of redemption?

Have we under the influences of the Holy Spirit, labored continually to fulfill the will of God, and attain his image, and possess his glory?

Have we not rather been so occupied with the things of time and sense, as to live almost, if not altogether, "without God in the world?"

2. Our conduct during the last year.

We have received innumerable blessings at God's hands; and how have we requited him?

We have committed innumerable sins; how have we humbled ourselves for them?

We have enjoyed many opportunities for spiritual advancement; how have we improved them?

Perhaps we have formed some purposes of amendment; have we carried them into effect to the extent we intended?

Has the loss of the years that preceded it made us diligent to improve, as it were, every hour of this year?

Are we as much fitter for the eternal world as we are nearer to it?

3. The very best work we ever performed.

Weigh it in the balance, and see if it is not found lacking. Examine the principle from which it flowed: was it as purely and entirely from love to God, and from a sense of gratitude to the Redeemer, as it ought to have been?

Look at the manner in which it was performed; was there all that humility, that zeal, that dependence on God for his grace and strength, which befit you?

Mark also the end for which it was done; was there a simple desire to serve, and please, and glorify God, without any mixture of self-pleasing, self-seeking, self-glorying?

Alas! alas! if only we would try ourselves by the perfect standard of God's law, we would see that we need One to "bear the iniquity of our holiest things;" and, for the best as well as for the worst of our actions, to cry out, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord; for in your sight shall no man living be justified!" If David and Job could not answer for the best of their actions, how much less can we? [Job 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2-3). [Psalm 130:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.3-4).

ADDRESS.

1. To the self-righteous and self-sufficient.

How unlike are you to David, or indeed to any other of the saints of God!

Look at Job; [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21); [Job 9:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-32); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6).

Look at Isaiah, [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5).

Look at Paul, [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18).

Are you better than they? Seek then to possess more of their spirit; for it is "he who humbles himself, and he alone, who shall ever be exalted".

2. To the broken-hearted and contrite.

Do not be discouraged because you see your vileness; but rather be thankful to God, who has made you sensible of your sinfulness. And do not imagine, that, because you cannot be justified by anything of your own, you cannot be justified at all; for Christ came into the world for sinners such as you, "He came to seek and to save that which was lost;" and the vilest person in the universe, if with a penitent and contrite heart he believes in Christ, is authorized confidently to say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22); [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

#739

GOD A REFUGE TO THE DISTRESSED

**[Psalm 143:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 143.7-10)**

"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. Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."

This is the last of what are called the Penitential Psalms. It is supposed, by many, that it was written at the time of Absalom's rebellion; but I conceive that it must rather have been penned during the persecutions which David suffered at the hands of Saul; because his trouble had evidently been of long continuance, verse 3; whereas that which arose from Absalom's rebellion was soon terminated. However this may be, it is plain that he was brought into great distress, and that he sought help, where alone it could be found—in the Lord his God.

That I may bring the substance of the Psalm distinctly before you, I will take occasion to show,

I. To what a state a godly man may, by accumulated troubles, be reduced.

Of David's piety, except in the matter of Uriah, we have no doubt.

But he was exposed to many and sore trials.

Even from his youth he was in continual danger from the persecutions of Saul; and how heavily they bore upon his mind, the Psalms which he composed most amply testify. "Save me, O God! For the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried; my eyes fail while I wait for my God."

Would we know what was the occasion of this overwhelming sorrow? He tells us, "Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully, are mighty, [Psalm 69:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.1-4)."

Much also was that holy man exercised with spiritual affliction. His feelings were quite in accordance with those of Heman in the 88th Psalm, "O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah.

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. All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me! [Psalm 88:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.1-7); [Psalm 88:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14-16)."

In the Psalm before us, the affliction which pressed the more heavily on David's mind seems to have been of a temporal kind; but it was very heavy, insomuch that "his spirit was overwhelmed within him, and his heart within him was desolate verse 4." This accounts for a degree of impatience which he manifested; which yet was the impatience of importunity only, and not of murmuring; and, consequently, was well pleasing to the Lord, "Hear me speedily, O Lord! my spirit fails." But from whatever source it flowed, it shows that:

Good men among ourselves may be reduced to like extremities.

No man is exempt from trouble, whether of a temporal or spiritual kind. Heavy trials, from whatever quarter they come, will still overwhelm the mind, especially if they are of long continuance. And Satan will take advantage of a season of dejection, to instill into the mind hard thoughts of God, and to sink it into utter despair.

The experience of holy Job clearly shows us how powerful the devices of Satan are, and how terrible his assaults. "The arrows of the Almighty are within me," says he, "the poison whereof drinks up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me! [Job 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.4)." Do not let any, then, take offence at religion, if they still find that people of genuine piety be occasionally harassed with temptation, or oppressed with a dread of God's avenging wrath. They may not immediately see why God contends with them; but they shall be made victorious in the end, yes, and "more than conquerors, through Him who loves them."

In confirmation of this, I proceed to show,

II. What a blessed refuge yet remains open to troubled believer.

To whom did David betake himself in this extremity?

In the preceding Psalm this point is answered, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto you, O Lord; I said, You are my refuge! [Psalm 142:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 142.4-5)."

Accordingly, in the Psalm before us, we find him crying unto the Lord, and saying, "I stretch forth my hands unto you; my soul thirsts after you, as a thirsty land." But let us mark how strongly he reiterates this in the words of my text, "Hear me speedily, O Lord! for in you do I trust; I lift up my soul unto you; I flee unto you to hide me; for you are my God!" He knew how utterly unable he was to deliver himself; while of God's condescension and grace he had had ample experience; and therefore, while destitute of all other hope, "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

And is there not the same blessed refuge **for us**at this day?

Yes, "God is a refuge for us, [Psalm 62:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.8);" and it is the privilege of every true believer to say, "In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God! [Psalm 62:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.7)." Of whatever kind our trials are, the direction given us is this, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you! [Psalm 55:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.22)."

Are we assaulted by persecutors? David's example will show us where to go, and how to obtain relief, "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against those who 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 them that persecute me; say unto my soul, I am your salvation! [Psalm 35:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.1-3)."

Is our trouble rather of a spiritual kind? The Prophet Isaiah clearly directs our way, "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his servant, that 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)."

To all, then, in the name of God himself, I would say, "Come, my people, enter into your chambers, (the perfections and the promises of your God,) and shut your doors about you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be over, [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20)."

Not to rest in this general view, I will go on to show,

III. What the troubled believer may hope to obtain by fervent and persevering prayer.

See what the petitions of David were, "Hear me speedily, O Lord! my spirit fails; hide not your face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear your loving-kindness in the morning; cause me to know the way wherein I should go; deliver me from my enemies; teach me to do your will; and lead me into the land of uprightness." Now, what in these petitions he sought, we also may hope by similar importunity to obtain:

1. The manifestations of God's favor.

An upright soul cannot but earnestly desire these; for "in His favor is life, and His loving-kindness is better than life itself, [Psalm 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3)." In comparison with this, there is nothing good, nothing desirable, in the whole universe, "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)." If a sense of God's favor be withdrawn, and his face be hidden from an upright soul, it is as the precincts of Hell itself, [Psalm 80:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 80.3-5). Seek then, in the first place, to be reconciled to God through the Son of his love; and cease not to importune him, until the morning arises upon you, and a sense of his loving-kindness is shed abroad in your hearts.

2. The interpositions of God's providence.

In arduous circumstances, our way is made exceeding difficult; so that oftentimes we know not what to do; we seem indeed to be shut up in the very hands of our enemies, and to have no way of escape open to us. But it is never in vain to call upon God, who in the very hour of extremity will appear for us, and will rescue us, like Peter, from our prison, when, to all human appearance, there is no longer any hope of escape, [Acts 12:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.6-9). Still is that proverb realized, "In the mount, the mount of difficulty, shall the Lord be seen, [Genesis 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.14)." Only cry out, like Jonah, "from the very belly of Hell;" and from thence shall you be delivered, [Jonah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.2); and your enemies, who sought your life, shall all be turned back, [2 Chronicles 18:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.31).

The whole people of Israel, at the Red Sea, appeared to be already, as it were, swallowed up by their powerful and blood-thirsty enemies; but a way was opened through the mighty waters, which became a path to Israel, and a grave to Egypt. And to us also will God still be known, as the God who "makes the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over, [Isaiah 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10)."

3. The influences of God's grace.

To the last hour of our lives we shall need the sanctifying and saving operations of God's Holy Spirit; and he will guide usin all our ways, until he bring us finally to the possession of his glory, [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24). His blessed Spirit is still as good and gracious and condescending as ever. He will teach us to do God's will, as well as to know it; and will make all our tribulation a way to his kingdom, [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22) and [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14), and our sufferings the means of fitting us for the enjoyment of it, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17). [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

Let us then learn, from this subject,

1. How to judge of our state before God.

It is not by our occasional feelings that we are to judge, but by our abiding taste. You may be fainting, and, in your own apprehension, ready to perish; and yet be in a state of safety before God; for Heman, Asaph, David, and Job, were all under great distress of mind, and were brought, for a season, to the very brink of despair. But if you are longing for a sense of God's favor as your supreme good, and are desirous to know, in order that you may do, his will—you have nothing to fear. You may be in darkness; but "light is sown for you;" and it shall spring up in due season. Your "weeping may endure for a night; but joy shall come in the morning, [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5)."

2. How to act under overwhelming calamities.

Do not go away from God, but to him; and the greater sense you have of your necessities, be only so much the more urgent in your application to him. That you may be overwhelmed for a season, the prophet acknowledges, "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint! [Isaiah 40:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.30-31)." Only "follow on to know the Lord;" and you shall as surely behold the light of his countenance, as the sun shall return after the darkest night, [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.3). "The vision, it is true, may tarry; but at its appointed season it shall come," and not disappoint the expectations of any creature in the universe who waits for it, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3).

#740

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

**[Psalm 144:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 144.15)**

"Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!"

To inquiries after happiness, one answer only can be given. Everything in the whole creation is forced to confess, "It is not in me! It is not in me!" Happiness can be found in God alone! The Psalmist's choice was the only one that could be made consistently with true wisdom, "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)."

The same is the judgment which he gives us in the passage before us. We may, indeed, understand the text rather as expressive of the union between piety towards God, and the temporal blessings consequent upon it; for it is certain that, under that dispensation, God did confer temporal benefits on those who served him with fidelity; but, if understood as a corrective of the foregoing statement, it will more fully express the general sentiment of Scripture.

The Psalmist, after describing a state of great national prosperity, says, "Blessed is that people that is in such a case;" and then, either in a way of confirmation, or of restriction, he adds, "Yes, blessed is that people whose God is the Lord!"

Were we disposed to deny the blessedness attendant on earthly prosperity, we should feel a jealousy over ourselves, in taking the two clauses of our text in a contrasted view; but, as it is our intention to give full weight to the former affirmation, and as the latter, if taken in somewhat of a contrasted view, contains a truth not confined to that dispensation, but common to every age and place, I shall take occasion, from the text, to show:

I. The comfort of earthly prosperity.

Too optimistic may be our expectations from earthly things, no doubt; but, on the other hand, it is possible to speak of earthly things in terms more contemptuous than either the Word of God, or the experience of his people will justify. It is common for people professing the Gospel, or even preaching it, to represent earthly things as altogether worthless. But who is there that finds them so? Who is there that does not experience pain from the want of them, and satisfaction from the supply, of them?

Nor is this feeling at all unfitting a real Christian; for Christians are men; and, consequently, susceptible of pain or pleasure from the want, or the enjoyment of the things that are needful for the body. Let anyone be honest, and he will confess that he is not so independent of earthly things as to feel no comfort from the possession of them, and no grief at the loss.

As for those who desire voluntary poverty and privations, they are no more really mortified to the world than others; they prefer the gratification of their spiritual lusts to merely corporeal indulgences; and whatever they take out of the scale of earthly pleasure, they put, in full proportion, into the opposite scale of pride and self-delight. They entertain a notion that the mortification of their bodies is meritorious, and that it will raise them in the estimation of God and man; and, under this impression, they pour contempt on earthly comforts. But they only exchange one lust for another that is equally hateful in the sight of God. Their superstition contradicts the testimony of God himself, who, both under the Old Testament and the New, promises earthly things under the notion of blessings. The whole Mosaic law was enforced with promises of temporal prosperity. Was not that an acknowledgment that temporal prosperity contributed to our comfort? Even under the New Testament dispensation, we are told that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8);" and, that "God has given us all things richly to enjoy, [1 Timothy 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.18);" which shows, that enjoyment is connected with the possession of them.

These observations, however, are confined to that mediocrity of condition to which Agur refers when he says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but food necessary for me [Proverbs 30:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.8)." For opulence does not of itself increase our comfort; it increases rather our temptations and our cares; for what has a man of extensive property, more than the mere enjoyment of "beholding it with his eyes?" In proportion "as his goods increase, those who eat them are increased, [Ecclesiastes 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.11)." A man's own personal comfort is confined within very narrow bounds, "food and clothing" constitute the catalogue of his needs, [1 Timothy 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.8); and whatever is beyond this, brings with it more the appearance, than the reality, of comfort. The peaceful and regular enjoyment of a moderate competency, however, is surely a rich blessing; and, with David, we may justly say, "Blessed are the people that are in such a case."

Yet, viewing the latter clause of our text as restricting the former, we must particularly observe, that earthly things are no blessings, except as they are subordinated to God; for the very instant they are put in the place of God, they may be apparent blessings; but in reality they are curses; as everything must be which estranges our hearts from God. As received from him, and employed for him, they are good; but, when they usurp his throne, and become an idol unto us, they are as contemptible as the very dirt under our feet.

That we may see earthly prosperity in its true light, it will be proper to view it in contrast with spiritual blessings; for which end I will proceed to mark,

II. The superior comfort of true piety.

Piety consists in "having the Lord for our God." The broad line of distinction between the righteous and the wicked is, that, while the wicked have their affections supremely placed on some object of time or sense, the righteous have their hearts entirely fixed on God, as reconciled to them in the Son of his love. Now these are far happier than any worldly man, for:

1. The godly have a more **suitable portion**.

What can the world do for the soul of any man?

He is oppressed with a sense of sin. What is there in the world that can remove this load from his mind?

He lacks the pardon of his sin, and peace with God. What can the world do to obtain these blessings for him?

He desires strength to resist temptation. Where upon earth can he go, with a hope of acquiring it?

He would gladly have death disarmed of its sting. But nothing in this world can render to him that invaluable service.

In a word, he would secure a happy eternity. But, ah! what it there upon earth that can confer on him so great a benefit? But if "he has the Lord Jehovah for his God," if he have sought Him, obtained His favor, and given up himself to Him—then all is well; he has nothing to fear; nothing to desire. In having God for his portion, he has secured to him the very things which he pants after; he has pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory!

2. The godly have a more **satisfying portion**.

Suppose a man to possess the whole world, there will still be in his bosom an aching void, a secret something unpossessed. But the man who can look up to the Lord Jesus Christ, and say, "This is my Friend, and my Beloved," "My Beloved is mine, and I am His," can never wish for anything beyond. Our blessed Lord has said, "He who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life! [John 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.13-14)."

Not only has earth nothing that can add to him, but not even Heaven itself contains anything that can augment his bliss. He can adopt the words of David and say, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you! [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)." I mean not to say that there is an indifference to earthly comforts produced upon his mind; but there is a contentment; insomuch that he is "fully instructed and prepared, either to be full or to be hungry, either to abound or to suffer need, [Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12)."

3. The godly have a more **lasting portion**.

Whatever a man possesses in this world, he must soon be stripped of it all, and "go as naked out of the world as he came into it." But at death, the godly man comes into the full possession of his inheritance. All that he enjoyed in this life was only like the portion of a minor, who has just a sufficiency allotted to him for his education in the world; but, when he goes hence, he comes of age, and takes possession of all the wealth provided for him by the Father. Millions of ages will not lessen his portion, or diminish his enjoyment of it!

Say, then, Is not he happy? Yes, we may say of him, as Moses does, "Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword! [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)."

This subject affords me a fit occasion to impress upon your minds:

1. The wisdom of industrious habits.

Do not think that this is a suggestion unworthy of a minister of the Gospel. Paul inculcates strongly and frequently this lesson, "Do not be slothful in business, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11);" "If any man will not work, neither shall he eat, [2 Thessalonians 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.10-12);" "Let him who stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him who needs, [Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.28)."

God has, in relation to the greater part of the world, appointed a connection between industry and the possession of earthly comforts. He has told us, and we daily see the truth of it, that "the diligent hand makes rich;" and that "idleness will clothe a man with rags." I would, therefore, say to all: Be diligent in your respective callings; and account it not beneath you to exert yourselves to the uttermost in every work that is assigned you, whether it is intellectual, for the improvement of your minds, or physical, for the discharge of any inferior duties.

I am not prepared to go the full length of a profound writer Paley, and say, that, in the pursuit of happiness, "occupation is all;" but certainly a constant and diligent prosecution of our respective duties contributes essentially, in the very act, to the happiness of our minds, and ultimately, in its consequences, to the comfort of our lives. Nor will it in the least interfere with the exercises of true piety; for when Paul says, "Do not be slothful in business," he adds at the same time, "Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord!"

2. The wisdom of seeking after God.

Diligence in the prosecution of earthly good may be defeated by a thousand unforeseen occurrences; but who ever failed in seeking after God? Moreover, many who have possessed the good things of this life, have afterwards, by untoward circumstances, been bereaved of them; but who, or what, can rob you of your God; who, if you really give yourselves up to him, has said, not only that "he will never depart from you, and that he will put his fear in your hearts, that you shall not depart from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)."

Besides, in the full possession of earthly things you may have no comfort in them, by reason of pain of body or distress of mind; but in those seasons God will be nearer to you, and will impart his consolations to you more abundantly, in proportion as you need his gracious help, [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5).

I say, then: Seek after God! Seek him as a reconciled God in Christ Jesus; seek him, until he has revealed himself fully to your souls, and enabled you to say, "O God, you are my God! [Psalm 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1)."

Then, without fear of contradiction, I will pronounce you happy; and if, in reference to earthly comforts, I must qualify my language, when I say, "Blessed are the people who are in such a case," I will, in the broadest and most unqualified terms, say, in reference to you, "Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord."

#741

PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS AND MERCY

**[Psalm 145:1-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-21)**

[Psalm 145:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-2) "I will extol you, my God, O King; and I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever!"

This is one of the Psalms, the verses of which successively begin with the different letters of the alphabet; and it is one in which (as in the five that follow it) there is nothing but uninterrupted praise and thanksgiving. It is as fine an exhibition of a spiritual frame of mind as any that can be found in all the Holy Scriptures.

The subject contained it has so much of unity, that the whole of it may not unprofitably be brought under our review. In it we observe the disposition of David's mind towards God. He determined to praise God himself, and he wished all others to praise him also. On this he speaks with fixedness of mind, to the same effect as in another Psalm, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise! [Psalm 57:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.7)."

He regards the Messiah as his "King," who justly claims this tribute at his hands; and he determines to pay it "daily," and to the last hour of his life, yes, and "to all eternity" also in the eternal world. Every succeeding generation of men he would wish to be occupied in that blessed employment; and gladly would he lead the band, that all creation might join him in one universal chorus.

But we will consider more distinctly the subjects of his praise. Having stated his determination to praise his God:

I. David celebrates the **perfections of God's nature**.

[Psalm 145:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.3-6) "Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds."

He mentions,

1. God's **greatness**.

This he declares to be unfathomable! And indeed it is so; for who can form any idea of his immensity? We speak of his filling all space; but in so speaking we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge."

If we look at his works, he is altogether incomprehensible there also; for, what conception have we of his calling forth into existence this terraqueous globe, together with all the heavenly bodies, and fixing them all in their order by a mere act of his will?

Nor are the "wonders" of his providence less worthy of our admiration, seeing that his greatness is no less visible in upholding all things by the word of his power, than it was in the first formation of them. Even the most "terrible of his acts" are also fit subjects for praise, inasmuch as they display the terrors of his Majesty, who gets honor to himself as well in the destruction of his enemies, as in the preservation of his obedient subjects. Doubtless the judgments inflicted on the old world, and those also with which Egypt, and Sodom, and the seven nations of Canaan, were visited, were most awful; but yet, as vindicating the holiness of God, and displaying "the honor of his Majesty," they are worthy to be contemplated with awe, and to be celebrated with the profoundest adoration!

2. God's **goodness**.

This was a favorite topic with the Psalmist; and therefore in speaking of that he says, "They shall abundantly utter the memory of it." See how everything in the whole creation bears the stamp of God's goodness! Everything is so fitted to its use. Everything is so conducive to the good of man, and to the happiness of the whole creation. Consider everything as originally formed; there is not the minutest thing in the universe that could, even with all the experience of six thousand years, be altered for the better! See with what blessings all the returning seasons are fraught! Let every individual search the records of his life, and what unnumbered instances of God's goodness towards him will he see! Surely, with David, we should "abundantly utter the memory of it," so as to make it the prominent subject of all our meditations, and of all our praise. And at the same time we should "sing of his righteousness," in that, while he has given us innumerable blessings which we never merited, he has never withheld one.

[Psalm 145:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.7) "They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness."

3. God's **mercy**.

In what has hitherto been spoken we are concerned as creatures; but in this attribute we are interested as sinners. And O! what reason have we to adore the tender mercy of our God! Who must not say with David, "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy!" Yes indeed, "He is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works!"

[Psalm 145:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.8-9) "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works!"

David, it is true, had very abundant cause to sing of mercy. And who has not? Who that knows anything of himself, is not penetrated with the deepest sense:  
of God's "grace," in looking upon so vile a sinner;  
of God's "compassion" towards him, when reduced to the most destitute condition;  
of God's "patience," in bearing with such manifold backslidings;  
and of God's "great mercy," in pardoning such innumerable transgressions?

If we do not extol our God, and bless his name, yes every day, and all the day long, methinks "the very stones will cry out against us."

Having thus expatiated on the virtues of his King,

II. David celebrates the **administration of God's government**.

Here the reference to Christ is more plain and direct. He is the King of Zion; and it is his kingdom that is established over the face of the whole earth. There is not anything in the whole creation that is not benefitted by his reign; but most of all his believing people. Hence David says, "All your works, whether intentionally or not, shall praise you," (as anything of intricate workmanship praises the maker of it) "but your saints shall bless you," having their whole souls turned to the delightful work!

[Psalm 145:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.10) "All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You!"

1. It is a **glorious** kingdom.

It is extended over Heaven, earth, and Hell.

In Heaven there are myriads who are the subjects of it, and who are ascribing all possible honor and glory to their Almighty King.

On earth, his power is seen in every nation under Heaven. The most potent monarchs bow down to him with the deepest reverence; while the most degraded savages are enriched with all the blessings of his kingdom.

In Hell, the principalities and powers, with Beelzebub at their head, confess his power, and are, however reluctantly, obedient to his commands. His moral commands indeed they do not fulfill; but his positive injunctions they are unable to resist; they are constrained to yield up to him the spoil which they had once seized for themselves, and to flee even from the face of a poor helpless sinner, when once he sets himself, in dependence on Divine aid, to resist their tyrannic sway.

In this kingdom, every subject is himself a king; a king in this world; and entitled to a crown, a throne, a kingdom, in the world to come. Well then might David say of these subjects, "They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and talk of your power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom!"

[Psalm 145:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.11-12) "They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom!"

2. It is also an **everlasting** kingdom.

[Psalm 145:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.13) "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations!"

Other kingdoms have perished, and shall perish; but God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Though it is as "a stone cut out without hands," and neither founded nor supported by human power, it "shall break in pieces all other kingdoms, and shall stand forever and ever." "The gates of Hell (with all their policy and power) shall never prevail against it;" no, nor against the lowest subject in it. Nay, when "the earth, and all that is therein, shall be burnt up and utterly dissolved," this kingdom shall continue in its utmost vigor; nor shall its prosperity languish as long as God himself shall endure.

What a theme for praise is here! O reflect upon it, all you who believe in Jesus; and sing of it, all you, who have sworn allegiance to his name.

III. David celebrates the operations of God's **grace**.

Here the influences of the Holy Spirit come more immediately to our view. It is he who carries on the whole work of grace in the hearts of men, and fits them for the enjoyment of that kingdom that is prepared for them. Behold his operations:

1. How **gracious**!

There is not a saint on earth whom he does not aid, according as his situation and circumstances require.

"Are any fallen? He upholds them; and raises up all that are bowed down," whether with sin or sorrow. "The eyes of all are directed to him" as the only source of spiritual nourishment and strength; and "he gives them such a portion as they need in the very season" that they need it. Yes; as in the kingdom of nature, God, as the father of all, "opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing," so, in the kingdom of his grace, he administers to every saint whatever is necessary for his consolation and support.

[Psalm 145:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.14-16) "The LORD upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing!"

He will indeed "be inquired after for these things;" but He will "allow none to seek his face in vain." He "draws near unto all that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth;" or, if they are not able to express their needs in words, "he will fulfill their very desires;" yes, if only, as on any sudden emergency, they "cry unto him, he will hear their cry, and will save them."

How astonishingly kind and gracious are these declarations; and how suited to encourage his weak and drooping saints! It frequently happens that they can do little else than sigh and groan; yet even these expressions of their minds he will favorably receive, and richly recompense unto their souls.

[Psalm 145:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.18-19) "The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them!"

2. How **righteous**!

Though God, as a sovereign, sovereignly dispenses his gifts according to the good pleasure of his will—yet there is an equity in all his proceedings, whether of providence or grace, gracious is the Lord, and righteous; he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works!

[Psalm 145:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.17) "The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and gracious in all His works!"

We, from our pride and ignorance, are ready to accuse him of injustice, if he sovereignly distinguishes any as monuments of his grace. But though "he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and has compassion on whom he will have compassion," yet is there, in truth, no inequality in his ways. "Our ways are unequal; but his are equal;" he invariably "rewards those who diligently seek him," and "becomes the enemy of those only who rebel, and vex his Holy Spirit." "He fills the hungry with good things, and the rich only does he send empty away." He puts, as it becomes him, "a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not." "They who love him shall be preserved," though the whole universe were combined to destroy them; but "all the wicked," whether old or young, rich or poor, "shall be destroyed;" "though hand join in hand, not one of them shall pass unpunished!"

[Psalm 145:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.20) "The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy!"

Say now, Whether, in this view of God, David's purposes and desires were not highly commendable.

[Psalm 145:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.21) "My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever!"

From the perusal of this Psalm, **two reflections**naturally arise:

1. What an elevation of character does true religion produce!

We would not speak in a degrading manner of any, and much less of those who are renowned for wisdom. Yet who does not see how low and groveling are the thoughts of statesmen and philosophers, in comparison with those which occupy the believer's mind? He soars, as it were, on angels' wings; he contemplates the subjects "which angels desire to look into;" "his conversation is in Heaven."

Brethren, let us not forget for what high destinies we are formed. The brute creation have their faces towards the earth, and have no conception of anything but what belongs to earth; but man is made erect, with his face, as it were, toward Heaven, where he should always direct his views, and from whence he should expect all his happiness.

Let us then think and speak as those who are partakers of a higher nature; and while the wise of this world content themselves with the subjects that relate to time and sense—let us explore:  
the blessings of redemption,  
the mysteries of grace,  
and the glories of eternity!

2. What loss do they sustain, who live far off from God!

It is the diligent and watchful Christian alone that feels the devout affections which are exercised in this Psalm. Too many of those who profess religion are content with a low state of mind. They look upon the work of praise and adoration as rather to be desired than attained; as that which will engage them in Heaven, rather than as that which they can be much occupied with on earth. The most of their devotions consist of formal lamentations on account of the deadness of their souls, and lukewarm petitions for pardon and acceptance.

Ah! what enemies are these to their own welfare! They might enjoy a very Heaven below—but they scarcely exceed in happiness, the people from whom they have come forth.

O, brethren, let it not be thus with you; aspire after high and heavenly things; be not satisfied without the brightest manifestations of God's love, and the richest communications of his grace! "Delight yourselves in God; and then he will give you the desire of your heart!"

#742

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO MAN

**[Psalm 145:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.8-9)**

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works!"

The great mystery of the Gospel is that which ought chiefly to occupy the Christian's mind. But it is well occasionally to contemplate God in a more enlarged view, as a God of providence and grace. The Psalmist in particular abounded in such "meditations," and found them exceeding "sweet" unto his soul. In the Psalm before us, his heart was greatly enlarged; and I pray that our hearts may be enlarged also, while we consider,

I. The character of God, as here portrayed.

1. Let us view God's character **generally**.

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works!"

Look at the state of the world around us. See how all mankind are involved in guilt and misery! See how incapable they are of restoring their fallen nature in any respect to purity or peace! But God Almighty is "gracious" unto them, for his own great name's sake; and is "full of compassion" towards them, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live."

Their rebellion against him is most daring and universal; yet he "endures them with much patience," being "slow to anger, and of great mercy." Were not this his character, another deluge would come and sweep away every living thing; or fire from Heaven would descend, as on the cities of the plain, to consume us in an instant! But, instead of breaking forth in wrath to destroy us, he is daily and graciously loading the whole world with benefits. The most evil and unthankful of the human race are visited by him in mercy, and replenished by him with all things that are needful for them. Above all, he has given up his beloved Son, to die in the place and stead of his rebellious creatures, to expiate their guilt, and to make atonement for their sins. He has commanded his Gospel also to be preached to them, even to the very ends of the earth, and a free salvation to be offered to every man. In this respect he makes no difference between Jews or Gentiles, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works!"

2. Let us view God's character **in our own personal experience**.

Where is there one among us who is not a living witness for God, in reference to these things? Who has had any claim upon him? Who has not, on the contrary, greatly offended him, and that times without number? Who cannot look back to some particular period of his life, when God might, if I may so speak, have cut him off and made him a signal monument of his fiery indignation? And who, in the midst of all his rebellion, has not graciously been loaded with God's benefits? Not only have we received temporal blessings in abundance, but spiritual blessings also; so far, at least, as we could be prevailed upon to receive them. We have experienced the strivings of his Spirit in our hearts and consciences; and if we would have listened to his voice, there is not one among us who should not have been guided into all truth, and been made a partaker of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. He has "waited to be gracious unto us;" and at this very moment does he follow us with his overtures of mercy, saying, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O House of Israel!"

From viewing the character of God, let us proceed to notice,

II. The reflections naturally suggested by God's character.

We cannot but see here,

1. Our base ingratitude.

What might we justly expect to be the state of our minds towards such a God as this? Methinks that we might well be filled with wonder and amazement at his forbearance towards us, and be striving to answer all the purposes of his grace by turning towards him with our whole hearts.

But how is it with us? We are, for the most part, altogether insensible of his mercy. We receive God's gracious blessings very nearly as they are received by the brute creation, without any distinct acknowledgment of him, or any heartfelt gratitude towards him. Scarcely of any mercy whatever are we sensible, but by the loss of it; when it is gone, we realize what we have enjoyed; but, while we possess it, it makes very little impression on our minds.

Even the great mercy of Salvation, that which fills all Heaven with wonder, is scarcely contemplated by us at all. Perhaps in the whole of our lives, we never spent one hour in adoring him for the gift of his only dear Son, and in imploring mercy at his hands in the Savior's name!

Say, brethren, whether this has not been your sad experience? and whether it does not mark you as base—beyond expression or conception base?

2. Our awful desert.

Take only this view of your state, and then say what you deserve at the hands of a holy God. What would you think a fellow-creature would deserve at your hands, if he should deal thus with you? Suppose you had exerted yourselves all your days to make him happy, and that with unbounded beneficence and inconceivable self-denial; and suppose, that, notwithstanding this, he never showed any regard for you, never concerned himself about you, never sought to please you, never obeyed any of your commands, but trampled under foot your authority, and made use of all the favors which you heaped upon him, for no other end than to wound your feelings and cast dishonor upon your name! Would you not say, 'You are unworthy of my "compassion," and shall be an object of it no longer. I have been "slow to anger" against you, and "of great mercy towards you;" but my patience is now exhausted, and can find no more scope for exercise. The mercies which you have so despised shall be now withdrawn, and you shall be left to eat the fruit of your own doings!'

If, then, you would think this an equitable retribution from one creature to another, judge what is due to yourselves from the hands of an offended God. You need not ever have committed one heinous sin to subject you to the wrath of God; this vile ingratitude alone will justify the infliction of his heaviest judgments on your souls!

3. The extreme folly of not turning unto God.

Is God so full of compassion towards you, so patient, so long-suffering, so abundant in mercy? And will you withstand him to the uttermost, until his patience is come to an end, and "his mercy is clean gone forever?" Nay, will you make use of all God's mercies for no better purpose than to aggravate your guilt, and to enhance your eternal condemnation?

Think what reflections will press upon your mind in the eternal world, when your hope is perished, and you are lost without a remedy. How bitter will be the thought, that you thus wasted your day of grace, and constrained your God to "swear in his wrath that you should never enter into his rest." Methinks the recollection of these things will be the bitterest ingredient in that bitter cup which you will have to drink of to all eternity.

Can you conceive, that if such tidings as now sound in your ears were sent to the heirs of perdition that are shut up in Hell, they would be so slighted as they are with you? No! Truly there would be in them, at least, a desire to escape from their torment, even though they did not affect the felicity of Heaven.

But neither the allurements of Heaven, nor the terrors of Hell can move you! I beg you, brethren, "harden not your hearts any longer;" but "today, while it is called today," avail yourselves of God's offered mercy in Christ Jesus, and "flee for refuge to the hope that he has set before you."

#743

GOD'S READINESS TO ANSWER PRAYER

**[Psalm 145:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.18-19)**

"The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them!"

One of the most endearing qualities of a monarch is, a readiness to listen to the petitions of his subjects, and to relieve, to the utmost of his power, their necessities. But no earthly potentate can be accessible to all; nor, if he were, could he supply their needs.

God alone is competent to this great task. With him there is no weariness, nor any defect either of inclination or of power. To him all may go, at all times, and under all circumstances; and, if they go to him, they shall find, by sweet experience, that "he is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think." Hence the name given to Jehovah by the Psalmist, is this, "O you who hears prayer." In the passage before us we are particularly led to contemplate God in this view. It is here said,

I. That God will hear the supplications of his praying people.

"The Lord is near unto all who call upon him."

Never will he turn a deaf ear to a humble suppliant. We read not of so much as one whom the Lord Jesus turned away in the days of his flesh, provided only that he came under a deep sense of his own necessities, and a humble expectation of relief from him.

In the same way, at this time there is no difference with respect to persons; God is ready to hear "all" without exception, whether those who have long approved themselves to him as faithful servants, or those who come to him for the first time in their whole lives, "He will be near unto them," the very instant they sincerely call upon him.

But who can declare all that is contained in this expression? As to his actual presence, God is near unto all, whether they call upon him or not. It is of the manifestations of his presence that the Psalmist speaks; and those will God grant to the souls of his faithful worshipers in a variety of ways.

He will "lift up the light of his countenance upon them;"

he will shed abroad his love in their hearts by the Holy Spirit;

he will give them the spirit of adoption, yes, and the witness of his Spirit, whereby they shall know that their prayers are both heard and answered.

We do not now speak of such testimonies as were given to Daniel, or Cornelius, but such as are promised in the prophecies of Isaiah to the church at large, "Then you shall call, and the Lord shall answer; you shall cry, and he shall say, Here I am! [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9)." To judge of these assurances of our acceptance, we must have experienced them in our own souls. To those who have not known them they must of necessity appear little better than the dreams of a heated imagination. But whatever the ignorant may say, "if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8)," and "will manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world, [John 14:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-22)."

It is here however supposed, that we call upon him "in truth".

Prayer must be sincere, in order to find acceptance with God. We cannot hope that it shall prevail, if it proceeds "from feigned lips." Of what value in the sight of God can a mere formal recital of words be? "It is in vain that we draw near to him with our lips, if our hearts be far from him." Or, supposing that we be earnest in our petitions, how can we hope that God will hear them, if we are hypocritically indulging any secret sins? David justly says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." By the prophet Isaiah, God speaks yet more strongly, "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; yes, when you make many prayers I will not hear; your hands are full of blood, [Isaiah 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.15) and [Proverbs 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.27)." "God is a spirit, and must be worshiped in spirit and in truth, [John 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.24);" and to those who so worship him, is his promise of acceptance confined, "Then shall you call upon me, and you shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And you shall seek me, and find me—when you shall search for me with all your heart, [Jeremiah 29:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.12-13)."

To this general promise of hearing his people's prayers, is added an assurance,

II. That God will hear them even under circumstances that may be supposed most unfavorable to their acceptance with him.

Where there have been much previous meditation, and subsequent fluency of expression, we are inclined to hope, that our prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord Almighty; but where these have been lacking, we are ready to doubt whether God will regard us at all.

But we are assured in our text that he will hear:

1. Our unpremeditated cries.

There are many occasions that arise so suddenly as to preclude a possibility of previous meditation. Such was the danger to which Jehoshaphat was exposed in the very heat of battle, when the Syrians mistook him for King Ahab, whom they were especially commanded to search out and to destroy; they had actually compassed him round about; and Jehoshaphat had only time to cry out to God; yet behold, so instantaneously did God hear and answer, that in a moment "he was helped, and his enemies were moved to depart from him, [2 Chronicles 18:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.30-31)."

Thus by ten thousand accidents may we be brought in danger of our lives, or by the devices of Satan be exposed to temptations that threaten to overwhelm and destroy our souls; but prayer will in an instant bring omnipotence to our aid! Look at Peter sinking in the waves; he cries, "Save, Lord; or I perish!" and, behold, the Savior instantly stretched out his hand, and saved him; and so will that Almighty Friend do to us also, whatever our difficulties or dangers are, according to that blessed promise, "It shall come to pass, that, 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)."

2. Our unexpressed desires.

It is but little that any man knows of his own necessities; and even those who know most of them, are often greatly at a loss to express their needs in prayer. There are times when the best of men feel their spirit straitened, and can utter their desires only in sighs and groans. This, I say, is the case with those whose knowledge is most enlarged, and whose abilities are most eminent. How then must it be with those whose intellectual powers are small, and who have never enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education?

Will God confine his answer to their immediate requests? No. He knows the meaning of a sigh or groan, as well as if it were expressed in the most fluent language. He knows that at the very time when his people can say little else, than, "Lord, help me; God be merciful to me a sinner," they would, if they could, expatiate upon all their needs, and pour out their souls before him in the most enlarged petitions. Hence, in his answers, he regards, not so much their words, as their needs; and enlarges the measure of his gifts in proportion to the extent of their desires. Whatever can tend to the peace of their minds or the perfection of their souls, that he imparts in rich abundance, communicating infinitely "more than they can ask or think! [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8) and [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)."

But, as in the former case it was supposed that the person calling upon him was sincere, so here it is supposed that the person, whose unpremeditated cries he hears, and whose unexpressed desires he fulfills, does really "fear him;" for it is that principle alone that can render their desires proper to be fulfilled, or their cries to be answered. Where the fear of God genuinely reigns in a person's heart—there God's will and God's glory, will alone be desired! [Proverbs 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.23); and where they are the objects of our desire, however "wide our mouth is opened, God will fill it, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)."

See from hence,

1. How wonderful is the condescension of God to his believing people!

What would a person, who feels his own incapacity to spread his needs before God, wish for? If God should say to him, Tell me what I shall say for your encouragement, what could the drooping sinner dictate more consoling to himself than what is spoken in our text?

Examine well in this view what God has spoken in another place; how strongly he depicts the hopeless state of the suppliant, and what effectual aid he promises to impart, [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18); and you will be prepared to estimate aright the promise in our text. Let none then give way to unbelieving fears, or be dejected because they find not in themselves all the liberty and fluency they could wish; but let the habitual desire of the soul be after God, and the bent of it is towards him on every emergency; then shall not one jot or tittle of this Word fail of its full accomplishment, [Psalm 34:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.18).

Let me very especially direct your attention to the climax which God is pleased to use in this place, for the purpose of encouraging his tempted people, and of magnifying his mercy towards them. In every phrase of the sentence he enlarges his promise; and, at the same time, lowers, as it were, the qualifications necessary for those to whom the promises are made.

To those who "call upon him in truth," he will "be near." To those alone who"fear him," and cherish, as it were, a feeble desire towards him, he will be so gracious as to "fulfill their desire."

And lastly, if any, through the greatness of their necessities, or an overwhelming sense of their unworthiness, are unable to do more than utter a "cry," he will listen to them—yes, and save them with an everlasting salvation.

The sigh, the groan, the tear shed in secret, shall come up with acceptance before him; even as Jeremiah's supplication did from the low dungeon, when he said, "Do not close your ears to my cry for relief! [Lamentations 3:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.56)."

2. What bitter self-reproach will they feel, who live and die without sincere prayer!

One of the most bitter ingredients in that cup of God's wrath which will be put into the hands of those who perish, will be the reflection that they might have had all the glory of Heaven, if only they would have sought it in earnest prayer. When, they once experience the torments of Hell, they may cry ever so long for a drop of water to cool their tongue, but they will not be able to obtain it. How will they then curse their folly, that they neglected to cry, when they might have obtained all that they could possibly desire! The recollection of that verse, "Ask, and you shall have," will be a dagger to their souls!

Dear friends, do but think of this in time. Think on what easy terms, if we may so speak, Heaven may be now obtained. If only you truly "fear God," and "call upon him in truth," you may be perfectly assured that you shall never be cast out. If God, unsolicited, gave you his only-begotten Son to die for you, what will he refuse you when you call upon him? He may delay indeed for a time to answer you; but not beyond the fittest time. "Continue constant in prayer," then, yes, "pray and faint not;" for God cannot resist the importunity of prayer. The unjust judge complied with the widow's request at last; and "will not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily."

#744

THE BLESSEDNESS OF TRUSTING IN GOD

**[Psalm 146:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.5)**

"Blessed is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God!"

How exalted was the frame of the Psalmist's mind at the time he penned these words! "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live I will praise the Lord! I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being! verse 1, 2." Who that reads these words does not envy him, and desire to be like him? But how shall we attain this heavenly frame? How did he acquire it? He had been contemplating the character of the Most High, and the saving interest which he himself enjoyed in the divine favor; and he records this as his decided testimony for the benefit of all future generations, "Blessed is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God!"

May the same benefit result to you, my brethren, while I,

I. Confirm his testimony.

Doubtless a carnal mind can see no blessedness in such contemplations as these; but one who is taught of God will fully accord with this inspired penman, from a conviction that the person here characterized may assure himself of two most important facts:

1. However numerous or powerful his enemies are, he can never be overcome.

Were his confidence in himself, he might soon be vanquished. Peter has manifested to us how weak the most intrepid man is, when left to himself; for, after all his boasting that he was ready to die with his Lord and Master, he denied him with oaths and curses. Nor is a person at all more secure who trusts in any created power, for  
however powerful a man may be, he may not be able to afford the assistance that is needed;  
or, if able, he may not be willing;  
or, if willing, he may change his mind;  
or, if fixed in purpose, he may be removed by death, when, of course, all his thoughts and purposes must perish! verse 3, 4.

But the man who sincerely trusts in God has an ever-present, an ever-willing, an immutable, an all-sufficient help! No confederacy, whether of men or devils, can prevail against him who sanctifies the Lord God in his heart, [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13), "There is a wall of fire round about him," that will both afford him protection, and destroy his every assailant, [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5) with [2 Kings 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.16-17). He may confidently challenge the whole universe, "If God is for me, who can be against me, [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)." Whether it is his body or his soul that is assaulted, he is equally secure, "No weapon that is formed against him," whether wielded by men or devils, can ever prosper, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17), "his God will be his shield and buckler, [Psalm 18:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.2);" and "he shall be more than a conqueror through Him who loves him! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)."

2. However enlarged his expectations are, he can never be disappointed.

We cannot expect too little from man, or too much from God! God, in giving himself to us as our God, authorizes us to expect from him all that he himself can do, so far as our necessities require it. He himself says to us, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10). We cannot open it too wide.

Take all the promises in God's blessed Word;  
take all that he has engaged for in his everlasting covenant;  
take all that the Lord Jesus Christ has merited in our behalf;  
take all that by any possibility we may ever need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity;  
take all the glory and blessedness of Heaven;  
take the very throne and kingdom of God himself;  
and put all this into one petition—and it shall all be given! Not an atom of it shall ever be lacking to the believing suppliant, so far as his soul shall be capable of enjoying it!

The believer should not be straitened in himself; for he is not straitened in his God. His hopes can never be too large; for God is both "able and willing to do for him . . .  
all,  
and above all,  
and abundantly above all,  
yes, exceeding abundantly above all,  
that he can either ask or think! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)."

Such being the testimony here given us; namely, that the man whose "help" is in God can never be overcome, and whose "hope" is in God can never be disappointed! Let me,

II. Commend it to your special attention.

We suppose you all to wish for a participation of the Psalmist's happiness. To all of you, then, I would say,

1. Seek to know the character of Jehovah, as here drawn.

We have not, in general, worthy conceptions of God, either as a God of Providence or as a God of Grace. We do not at all realize in our minds his universal agency, or the tender care which he takes of his believing people, insomuch that not a hair falls from the head of any of them without his special permission.

But see in what light the Psalmist viewed him, when he gave concerning him the testimony which we are now considering, "Blessed is he . . .  
who has the God of Jacob for his help;  
whose hope is in the Lord his God;  
who made Heaven and earth, the sea and all that is therein;  
who keeps truth forever;  
who executes judgment for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry;  
who loosens the prisoners,  
and opens the eyes of the blind,  
and raises those who are bowed down,  
and loves the righteous,  
and preserves the strangers,  
and relieves the fatherless and the widow! verses 5-9."

See all these diversified conditions; see the relief administered agreeably to the necessities of all; and then say, whether he be not happy who has this God for his help? If you had all the men upon earth engaged for your support, yes, and all the angels in Heaven too, it would be nothing in comparison with the blessings you enjoy.

Only realize the thought that every perfection of God is occupied day and night in your behalf, for the express purpose of securing and consummating your eternal happiness; and you will need nothing more to render you completely happy, amidst all the diversified scenes of this vain and troublesome world!

2. Seek to obtain a saving interest in him, as **your**God.

Doubtless, unless he is your God, you can derive no comfort from the consideration of his perfections; for, whatever he may be to others, to you he will be only "a consuming fire! [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29)."

But how shall he be made your God? There is but one way, and that is by sincere believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; for "to all that believe in Christ, is given the privilege of becoming sons of God, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12);" "and if sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

Look then, and see what a interest Christ himself possesses in the Father's love; see all that the Father did for him; see him now sitting at the right hand of the Father, in inconceivable blessedness and glory. All this shall you also inherit together with him; for, "all things are yours, if you are Christ's, [1 Corinthians 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22-23)."

Will you not, then, come to Christ, and cleave unto him, and live by faith upon him? Methinks I need not urge this upon you; your own minds are already bent upon this; and you are determined, through grace, to renounce everything in comparison with Christ, and to make him "all your salvation and all your desire."

3. Make use of God for all the ends for which he has given himself to you.

When once you can say, with David, "O God, you are my God!" then carry to this almighty Friend your every need, your every wish. Lean not at any time to your own wisdom; and undertake nothing in your own strength. Look to your God for guidance, even in the most common affairs of life; and, in all the difficulties which you may be called to encounter, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Remember all that he did for "Jacob, whose God he was." And remember the promise he has made to you, "Do not fear; for I am with you; be not 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)."

What though in yourself you are only as a worm? he says to you, "Do not fear, worm Jacob; for you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff, [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-15)." Only make him "your help, and him your hope," and you have nothing to fear. Let nothing, on the one hand, be deemed too great to carry to him; nor, on the other hand, account anything so small that you may engage in it without his aid. Let "Him work all your works in you, [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12)," and you are safe, even as if you were already before his throne; for "you are in his hands, nor shall any be ever able to pluck you thence! [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)."

To every one, then, who really and altogether relies on God, I will address that inspired congratulation, "Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places! [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)."

#745

THE EXTENT OF CHRIST'S COMPASSION

**[Psalm 146:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.7-8)**

"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."

As David was a very eminent type of Christ, so was he inspired to prophesy of Christ; and, if we look no further than to the passages quoted out of the Psalms in the New Testament, we shall find that he wrote as fully and as minutely respecting the Messiah, as any other prophet whatever, not excepting even Isaiah himself.

He described his person as God and man, [Psalm 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.4) with [Hebrews 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.6) and [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1) with [Luke 20:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.42). or [Psalm 45:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.6) with [Hebrews 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8).

He declared the whole of his work;

his first covenant engagements with the Father, [Psalm 40:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-7) with [Hebrews 10:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.6-7);

his incarnation, [Psalm 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.5) with [Hebrews 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.7);

together with his active obedience [Psalm 69:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.9) with [John 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.17);

and his unparalleled sufferings unto death, Psalms 22, 69 with all the accounts in the Gospels.

He foretold his resurrection, [Psalm 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.10) with [Acts 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.27); and ascension [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18) with [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8);

his session at the right hand of God [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1) with [Acts 2:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.35);

and his final appearance to judge the world, [Psalm 102:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.26-27) with [Hebrews 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.12).

He proclaimed also his offices:  
as a prophet, [Psalm 78:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.2) with [Matthew 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.35),  
priest, [Psalm 110:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.4) with [Hebrews 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.17),  
and king, [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6) with [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5).

We do not indeed find the Psalm that is before us expressly cited in the New Testament; but the whole of it so accords with what is elsewhere spoken respecting him. Compare [Isaiah 42:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.6-7); [Isaiah 35:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5) with [John 9:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.32) and [Matthew 11:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.3-5), and the very words of the text are so descriptive of what Christ himself declared to be the great end of his mission, [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3) with [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18); [Luke 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.21).

N. B. The foregoing passages are cited only for the satisfaction of the reader, and not with a view to their being incorporated with the discourse. Nevertheless they would form the substance of a profitable discourse on [Acts 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.25). ("David speaks concerning him;") in which it might be shown how copiously and how minutely David speaks of the Messiah, that we can feel no hesitation in interpreting it as relating to Christ.

In this beautiful description then of our Lord's compassion to man, we may observe:

I. Its boundless extent.

The calamities with which the human race are afflicted are very numerous; nor is there any trouble which the Lord will not either remove or sanctify, if we call upon him. But as the remedying of our spiritual maladies was the principal end of his coming, we shall direct our attention more immediately to them. In the words before us then we may notice his regards:

1. To the blind and willing slaves of sin.

The world at large are in bondage to their lusts, and to that wicked one who leads them captive at his will; and they are shut up under a sentence of condemnation for their numberless violations of the law of God! [Galatians 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.23). Yet, so blind are they to their real state, that they cannot see, and will not believe it. Their cunning adversary has undertaken to be their guide, but has led them into the heart of the enemies country, and, if mercy do not interpose, into the very jaws of destruction! Alluding to [2 Kings 6:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.18-21).

But the Lord Jesus is not an unconcerned spectator of their misery; he is ready to weep over them as over the murderous Jerusalem; and even while they reject him, he "would gladly gather them, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."

He would give them an eye-salve, whereby they should be enabled to see clearly, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18).

He would cause their chains to fall off, and would say to them, go forth, and show yourselves, [Isaiah 49:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.9) with [Acts 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.18-20).

Yes, so desirous is he to exercise mercy towards them, that nothing but a determined rejection of his grace can involve them in final ruin.

2. To penitents "bowed down" under a sense of sin.

Whatever be the afflictions under which we groan, we may carry them all to him, with an assured expectation of sympathy and support, since he is at all times "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.4)."

But if sin is our burden,  
if a sense of guilt lies heavy on our conscience,  
if our indwelling corruption is to us as a putrid carcass from which we cannot get loose, and which causes us to loath and abhor ourselves

—then we need not fear but that our Lord will soon come to our help. "He will never break a bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory." The sighs and groans of a contrite soul will surely enter into his ears, and call forth his almighty aid. He may indeed for wise purposes allow the pressure to be heavy and of long continuance, [Psalm 38:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.2); [Psalm 38:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.4); [Psalm 38:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.6); [Psalm 38:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.8); [Psalm 38:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.21-22); [Psalm 142:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 142.6-7), insomuch that the weeping penitent may be ready to say, "The Lord will not hear, neither will the Almighty regard me;" but at the fittest season he will interpose to revive the drooping spirit, and to "make the bones which he has broken to rejoice." "He will take the beggar from the dunghill to set him among the princes! [1 Samuel 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.7-8)."

3. To "the righteous" who are delivered from the power of sin.

They are justly deemed "righteous," who, in the habit of their minds, and the general tenor of their lives, are devoted to God. Allowed sin, of whatever kind it were, would exclude us from this number, and mark us as children of the devil! [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8). But if we are really clothed with the Redeemer's righteousness, and "walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," we need not fear to take to ourselves this honorable appellation, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1). And if this character is ours, the Lord loves us, not merely as he does sinners in general, with a love of pity, but with a love of delight, "he rejoices over us with joy, he rests in his love, he rejoices over us with singing! [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17)."

There is not any blessing which our souls can need, but God in his love will bestow it. We do not say, That he will forbear to chasten us (for that would be a mark of hatred rather than of love, [Hebrews 12:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6-8).) but, that he will deal with us in all things as a wise and tender parent, administering to us such things, in such a measure, at such a time, and in such a manner, as his unerring wisdom knows to be best for us.

But we cannot rightly appreciate the Savior's love, unless we notice particularly:

II. Its unremitted exercise.

Long before David existed in the world, our Lord had shown forth all his love to his people in the wilderness; nor did he ever leave that ungrateful nation without abundant tokens of his regard.

In the days of his sojourning on earth, his whole life was spent in doing good to the most indigent and most unworthy.

Nor has he yet suspended the exercise of his grace; he still manifests his regard to his redeemed people, and effects his purposes towards them,

1. By his **providence**.

Wonderful are the ways whereby he accomplishes his own eternal counsels. The histories of Joseph and his family, and of Esther and the captive Jews, give us an insight into the things which are yet daily passing in the world.

Many events appear to us casual and trifling; but the truth is that not one is casual, not one is trifling. Every minute circumstance is ordered by the Lord, and forms a link in the chain of his unerring providence. Not a hair of our head falls, but by his appointment! It remains our duty to mark his dispensations with care, and improve them with diligence.

Let any whose eyes have been opened, or whose souls have been liberated from spiritual bondage, look back and see the way by which they have been brought to the enjoyment of these mercies; and they shall find such a mysterious chain of causes and effects as will furnish them with matter of astonishment to all eternity!

2. By his **grace**.

It is not said in the text that the Lord had done or should do those particular things ascribed to him; but he is spoken of as actually doing them; so that there is no day, no hour, wherein he is not engaged in this blessed work. He makes his Word effectual at this time, no less than formerly, "to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

At this time also he heals the wounded spirit, and sheds abroad his love in the hearts of his faithful people. What if his Word has not as much energy as in the days of the Apostles? or his Spirit is not poured out in such an abundant measure? "Has he forgotten to be gracious, or, in anger, shut up his tender mercies?" Surely there are many in these days, who can say, I was once in bondage, but now enjoy liberty; I was blind, but now see; I was bowed down under a heavy load of temptation and corruption, but my strength has been renewed like the eagle's; I once had no idea what was meant by the sealing of the Spirit, or the witness of the Spirit, but I have now received such tokens of my Savior's love, as have assured my mind, that my "Beloved is mine, and I am his."

Let it be known then that Christ is still communicating his blessings to his church, and that it is both our duty and our privilege to enjoy them.

INFERENCES.

1. How great is the folly and wickedness of those who neglect Christ!

If our maladies were of a bodily nature, and relief were offered to us—would we not be deemed insane if we despised it? And, if our benefactor had put himself to great expense and trouble to procure us that relief, would our contempt of him be thought a light offence? The application of this to our state is obvious.

But let the energetic language of the text be marked; why does the Psalmist no less than four times repeat the name of Christ? Is it not the more effectually to call our attention to him? And does not this in a very pointed manner reprove the sin of neglecting him? If then we would not greatly multiply our own sorrows, and rush on blindly to everlasting destruction, let us seek to experience his offered mercies, and to become the objects of his unalterable love.

2. How little reason is there for anyone to entertain desponding fears!

The state of those who are immured in dungeons under a sentence of condemnation, or are deprived of the faculty of vision, may be justly considered as desperate in the extreme, and as representing in very gloomy colors the condition of men's souls.

But there is nothing impossible with God; our adorable Savior is both able and willing to effect deliverance; and, if, like the woman in the Gospel, we have been bowed down under a spirit of infirmity for eighteen, or eighty, years, [Luke 13:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.11-12), one word of his can instantly release us. And, if once we are savingly interested in his righteousness, and renewed in the spirit of our minds, there is not anything which we may not expect from him; if once he loves us, he will love us to the end, [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1). Let none then say, There is no hope; but let us entertain worthy thoughts of our almighty Deliverer; for, however much our expectations of mercy may be raised, we can never be disappointed, if we put our trust in him.

#746

THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD

**[Psalm 147:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.5-7)**

"Great is our Lord, and great is his power! His wisdom is infinite! The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp."

An saving acquaintance with God is the one object which we should seek after; since by that alone can we ascertain the extent of our guilt and danger; or be brought to accept the salvation offered us in the Gospel. In the passage before us we have a glorious representation of him; and if we view him aright, our souls will be filled with unutterable peace and joy.

Let us consider,

I. The character of God as here declared.

1. God is here set before us **in his essential attributes**. He is a God of inconceivable power, and of infinite wisdom.

View him in the works of creation, and see what a union of these two perfections is displayed both in Heaven and earth.

Behold God's inconceivable power, and of infinite wisdom in all the works of providence, upholding everything in its order, and accomplishing for everything all that is necessary for its well-being.

Behold God's inconceivable power, and of infinite wisdom, above all in his works of grace. Well is the Gospel called the "wisdom of God and the power of God! [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24)."

Truly when man had fallen after the example of angels, it seemed impossible but that he must also share their doom. But infinite wisdom devised a way whereby mercy might be extended to sinners in perfect consistency with the rights of justice; and the inconceivable power of God has carried into effect that plan, "laying help for us upon One that was mighty," and opening, through the sacrifice of his only-begotten Son, a way of acceptance with him. [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15).

Had either of these perfections existed in him without the other, his power would have been an object of terror only, and his wisdom might have been exercised for us in vain. But their united exercise renders him a fit object for our most ardent love and unbounded trust!

2. God is here set before us **in his dealings with mankind**.

"The humble" are objects of his peculiar care. But under this name we do not comprehend those who are naturally of a calm and placid disposition; but those who are humbled under a sense of sin, and abased before God as deserving his wrath and indignation! [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1).

Now such as these "he lifts up," speaking peace to their souls, and causing their hearts to overflow with joy, [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3); If there were but one such person in the universe, God would search him out, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2); and "raise him up out of the dust to set him among princes, and to make him inherit a throne of glory, [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8)."

On the other hand, "the wicked," who hold fast their wickedness and refuse to humble themselves before him, "he will cast down to the ground," and consign over to everlasting perdition, [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17). He will assuredly, and in all cases, carry into effect that determination which he has so often announced to us, of "abasing the proud, and exalting those who humble themselves before him! [Isaiah 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.11).

Let us now proceed to mark,

II. The effect which this view of God should produce upon us.

In this view should every living soul rejoice.

1. The wicked themselves.

What a ground of joy should it be to them, that they are not, as they well might have been, already shut up in Hell, but that they have still an opportunity of embracing the salvation which infinite wisdom has devised; and almighty power is ready to impart! To every such person I say, Compare your state with those whose day of grace has closed, and, amidst all your sorrows for your past sins, bless and adore and magnify your God, that it is yet "the day of salvation" to you! [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.2), and that you have yet One following you with that blessed assurance, "Him who comes unto me, I will never cast out".

2. The humble in particular.

Well does the Psalmist say to you, "Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God."

Do but think what a Protector you have, even one who is infinitely wise to discover all that your great adversary is plotting for your destruction; and infinitely powerful to shield you from his fiercest assaults! Surely you may adopt the triumphant language of Paul, [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39), since, however weak you are, God has engaged to "perfect his own strength in your weakness".

Think too what a Friend you have, who will "supply your every need out of the fullness that is in Christ Jesus," and employ all his wisdom and all his power for the enriching and comforting of your souls.

Lastly, think what a Rewarder you have, who has provided for you on earth whatever his infinite wisdom has judged best, and his almighty power can impart to make you happy; while in Heaven is reserved for you an eternity of inconceivable and unutterable bliss!

I say then to you especially, "tune your harps to sing the praises" of your redeeming God; and live in the habitual and delightful anticipation of the blessedness that awaits you in the eternal world!

#747

GOD'S REGARD FOR THE LEAST OF HIS SAINTS

**[Psalm 147:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.11)**

"The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his mercy!"

In the Psalms of David we have innumerable exhortations to praise our God. At the same time, we have innumerable grounds of praise set before us. In the Psalm before us we are told how abundant he is in mercy both to the Church and to the whole creation; and that, while there is nothing of created excellence that merits his regard, verse 10, "he takes pleasure" in those who manifest the very smallest symptoms of a new creation within them.

The words of my text are, in this view, worthy of peculiar attention. In them we see,

I. How low God stoops to the objects of his favor.

Had he spoken of himself as noticing angels—it would have been a wonderful mark of his condescension and grace; for "he humbles himself when he beholds the things that are in Heaven, [Psalm 113:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 113.6)," and "charges even his angels with folly, [Job 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.18)."

But the people whom he speaks of here, as objects of his favor, are of the lowest possible order of saints. In point of regard for God, they rise no higher than "fear;" and in point of confidence in God, they go not beyond a "hope in his mercy."

What can be lower than the mere "fear" of God?

A person destitute of this has not the smallest evidence whatever of the divine approbation. He cannot have it. A man without the fear of God is a decided enemy to God; and God is, and must be, an enemy to him.

A person, the very instant he is born of God, must of necessity fear to offend him, and endeavor, by a holy conformity to his will, to please him. After having made a progress in the divine life, he will attain to higher exercises of grace; but in this the lowest state of conversion, God will regard him as an object of his favor.

And what lower attainment can we conceive, than a mere "hope in his mercy?"

This supposes that a man feels himself a sinner, justly liable to God's wrathful indignation. It supposes, too, that he despairs of ever being able to do anything that shall conciliate the divine power! He sees and feels that he must entirely cast himself on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. At the same time, he sees that there is a sufficiency for him in Christ; a sufficiency in his death to atone for all sin; and a sufficiency in his righteousness, to justify all who shall be clothed in it before God. With these views, he indulges a hope that even he may obtain mercy at God's hands; and on God's mercy he casts himself without reserve; determining, if he perishes, to perish at the foot of the cross, imploring mercy of God for Christ's sake.

Lower than this we cannot go; for if a person has not attained to this, he has not entered into the fold of Christ. He may be an outward-court worshiper; but on the threshold of God's sanctuary he has not so much as once set his foot.

Yet, as low as their condition is, the text informs us,

II. How high God soars in his regards towards them.

Had it been said that God would look with pity and compassion upon such feeble worms, it would have displayed in him a most astonishing extent of condescension and grace. But we are told, not that he will show favor to them, and accept them, but that "he takes pleasure" in them. Yet how can this be conceived? What can he ever see in them, that shall afford him pleasure? However little we may be able to conceive it, he does "take pleasure" in them.

1. God takes pleasure in looking upon them.

He himself draws this very character, and says, "To this man will I look, even to him who is of a broken and contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word! [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15); [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2)." If it is asked, What can he find in them to engage his regards? I answer, What can a mother behold in a new-born infant to engage her affections? The child, though so weak and helpless, is hers, a partaker of her nature, and an heir of her inheritance; and therefore she feels an intensity of interest in the child, and finds in the sight of it an exquisite delight!

2. God takes pleasure in answering their prayers.

A mother understands the cry of her child, and needs no further incentive to fulfill its desires. In the same way, God, too, understands the sigh, the groan, the very look of his children, and will grant to them whatever they can desire, provided it is really conducive to their good. "Even before they call, he will answer; and while they are yet speaking, he will hear! [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24)."

3. God takes pleasure in administering to all their needs.

All Heaven, us it were, shall be at their command, [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20) with [Psalm 34:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.10). In the aid that he affords, God will exert himself effectually, even "with his whole heart and his whole soul, [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.41);" and in the bestowment of his blessings, he will rejoice over the beloved object with such a joy and delight as God alone can feel, [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17).

Are you, then, my brethren, partakers of this character?

Consider who it is that "has made us for this very purpose, 2 Corinthians 5:5;" and endeavor to "render to him according to the benefits he has conferred on you." Do not say, 'My attainments are so small, that they call for shame and sorrow, rather than for joy.' For "God does not despise the day of small things, [Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.10);" neither must you despise it. Methinks the least that I can ask of you is this; If "God takes such pleasure" in you, then you must also take pleasure in him. The more you "delight yourselves in him," the more assuredly shall you grow in everything that is good, until you have attained "the full measure of the stature of Christ."

Is there one among you who is not of this character!

What pleasure can God ever take in you? Can he look with delight on a rebellious man that does not "fear him," or on a self-righteous man that does not "hope in his mercy?" Impossible! for you counteract all the designs of his grace, and run, as it were, upon the thick bosses of his buckler, in your opposition to him. In such a state as this, what can you be but objects of his wrathful indignation, left for a season to fill up the measure of your iniquities, and to perish under an accumulated weight of misery!

Let me, then, entreat you to seek the graces which are here specified. Beg of God, for Christ's sake, to "put his fear in your hearts;" and cast yourselves upon his mercy in Christ Jesus, "hoping even against hope." Then, notwithstanding your deservings, you shall not perish, but have in yourselves an experience of that truth which God has revealed for the comfort and support of all his people, "that the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses from all sin!"

#748

TEMPORAL MERCIES A GROUND OF PRAISE

**[Psalm 147:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.12-14)**

"Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion, for  
 he strengthens the bars of your gates,  
 and blesses your people within you.  
 He grants peace to your borders,  
 and satisfies you with the finest of wheat."

[Thanksgiving Sermon for Peace, written January 18, 1816. It is not to be supposed that the same circumstances will ever occur again; and therefore the first intention of the author was to omit them altogether. But he conceives that the statement of them may serve to show, how any other existing circumstances may be, not unprofitably, stated, when the occasion shall call for it.]

The common habit of mankind is to rest in the gift, and forget the Giver. But we should make the gifts of God a ladder, as it were, whereby to ascend to him; and take occasion from every blessing he communicates, to magnify and adore that bounty from which it proceeds. Nor should we be so engrossed with our personal mercies, as to overlook those which are national.

The pious Jews thought they could never sufficiently praise their God for his mercies given to Israel. The theme that beyond all delighted them was, to recount the wonders of love and mercy which their nation had experienced from their first coming out of Egypt even to the day wherein they lived.

Who was the author of this Psalm we do not know; but it seems evidently to have been written after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity, and most probably in the times of Nehemiah, who rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, and dedicated it to God with sacrifices and songs of praise, [Nehemiah 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 12.27); [Nehemiah 12:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 12.43). Certainly God's interpositions for that people exceeded all that ever he did for any other nation; but next to Israel, methinks, we of this country may adopt the language at the close of this Psalm, "He has not dealt so with any nation, verse 20." Let us consider,

I. The **grounds** here stated for praise to God.

We forbear to enter on the Jewish history for the elucidation of our text; intending rather to confine ourselves to the mercies which we are at this time called to commemorate.

Behold then what the Lord has done for us!

1. Behold the **protection** which God has given to us.

"God strengthens the bars of your gates!"

Every country in Europe, except our own, has suffered from the ravages of war. Yet we, with our vast extent of coast, assailable from every port in Europe, and with every power in Europe at one time leagued against us, have been preserved from invasion; notwithstanding we were, far beyond any other nation, the objects of envy and hatred to our most powerful foe; and notwithstanding the immense preparations that were made by him for our destruction.

But God has truly "strengthened the bars of our gates," so that they could not be forced; or rather "he himself has been a wall of fire round about us," so that not even any serious attempt has been made to invade our land. Other nations far less accessible than ours have been made scenes of most dreadful devastation, [Russia in 1812; but with respect to us, such a restraint has been imposed on our enemies, that they could never carry into execution their cruel projects, [Psalm 124:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 124.1-8).

2. Behold the **blessings** with which God has loaded us.

"God blesses your people within you!"

He has blessed us with increase, so that, notwithstanding the ravages of war, our population has greatly increased. With union of sentiment he has blessed us to an extent almost unprecedented in our history. The whole nation has been fully convinced, that the war was both just and necessary, and that it was carried on, not for the gratifying of ambition, but for security and independence.

With a patient endurance of all the burdens occasioned by the war, all ranks and orders among us have also been greatly blessed. It could never have been conceived that such contributions could have been raised without exciting the most grievous complaints; but they have been paid with liberality and cheerfulness from one end of the land even to the other.

With a respect for religion also we have been blessed beyond any former period of our existence as a nation. The societies that have sprung up, in the very midst of war, for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures throughout the world, for the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles to Christ, for the instruction of the rising generation, and for the promotion of piety in every possible way, have far exceeded all that had arisen during whole centuries before.

Truly these things abundantly show how greatly God has blessed us; insomuch that we may say, like Israel of old, "He has not dealt so with any nation! verse 20."

3. Behold **the restoration of peace** in our borders.

"He grants peace to your borders."

With only two short intervals, the war has continued twenty-five years; and now at last we are favored with a peace, which, we hope and trust, will be of long continuance. It is not such a peace as has been often made, a peace no better than an armed truce; but one which our enemy will scarcely venture to violate, seeing that all Europe is leagued together for its preservation. To say that it is a favorable peace, is to disparage it altogether; for it infinitely surpasses all that our most optimistic or ambitious statesmen of former days ever ventured to desire. It has left us too in a state of elevation, prosperity, and power, which our country never before attained. And we have the happiness to say, it is universal, in India, no less than in America and Europe.

Now has the happy time come when, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken! [Micah 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.3-4)."

4. Behold **the abundant provision** which God has made for our needs.

"God satisfies you with the finest of wheat!"

When an extraordinary plenty was predicted by the prophet Elisha in Samaria, the answer given him by the chief courtier was, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in Heaven, might this thing be? [1 Kings 7:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 7.1-2)." In other words, "The thing is impossible."

In the same strain would anyone have replied, if the existing state of things had been predicted as to be accomplished among us. But behold, we are, contrary to all reasonable expectation, so "filled with the finest of the wheat," that the very cheapness of it creates a general embarrassment; and this singular phenomenon exists, that the only subject of complaint heard in the nation at this time is, that God has been too good to us, and has overwhelmed us, as it were, with his superabundant kindness and bounty. The promise made to Israel has been almost literally fulfilled to us; he has given us such abundance, that "we have scarcely room to receive it! [Malachi 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.10)."

Such being the circumstances of our country at this day, let us consider,

II. Our duty arising from them.

Every blessing which God bestows, whether on nations or individuals, calls for a suitable tribute of praise and thanksgiving. Such a tribute are we at this time called to pay, "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion!"

In order that we may discharge this debt for so many mercies:

1. Let us view the hand of God in our multiplied mercies.

As "war and pestilence and famine are judgments sent of God," so peace and all other national blessings are the gifts of his gracious providence. "There is neither good nor evil in a city, but it proceeds from God." Especially must he be viewed in all those great mercies which have been given to us. Israel of old had not more abundant reason for the acknowledgments made by them, than we ourselves to adopt their strains! See [Psalm 124:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 124.1-8). We are but too apt to be looking to second causes, and to be giving to the creature the honor that is due to God alone. But let us be on our guard against this, lest we turn every blessing that has been bestowed upon us into a curse!

2. Let us duly appreciate the value of our multiplied mercies.

It is not easy for us, who have seen so little of the calamities of war, to estimate in any measure aright, either the protection we have experienced, or the peace which has terminated all our dangers. But, if we could go over a field of battle where myriads of the dead and dying are strewed upon the ground; if we could traverse whole provinces which have been desolated by fire and sword, where countless multitudes are reduced to the utmost possible distress and misery by their pitiless enemies; if we could see with what rapid strides pestilence and famine are following in the train of war—then methinks we should need no exhortation to gratitude for the blessings we now enjoy.

True it is that spiritual blessings are of incalculably greater importance; and if we could say, that we had been protected from the incursions of sin and Satan; that we had been "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus;" that we had been brought to a state of peace with God and in our own consciences; and that we enjoyed in rich profusion the bread of life—we should then have more abundant cause for praise.

But we must not forget that our temporal blessings, especially when compared with the troubles which we might have been at this time enduring, have a most favorable aspect on our spiritual welfare; and that the more spiritual we are, the more disposed we shall be to acknowledge God's kindness towards us, wherever it has been displayed.

We must remember, too, that, as members of the great body of the nation, we are called to bless God for our national mercies. Now national mercies are of a temporal nature; no nation, as a nation, participates in spiritual blessings, any further than the mere external enjoyment of them; individuals alone have the grace of God in their hearts; and therefore, as members of the national body, we are bound, in whatever capacity we have received God's mercies, in that capacity, as far as possible, gratefully to requite them.

3. Let us render unto God the tribute our multiplied mercies demand.

"Praise" is surely the least that we can render for such accumulated blessings; and this, as is observed in the Psalm before us, is "both lovely and pleasant! verse 1."

Behold how Moses adored God for the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian hosts, [Exodus 15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15).

See how David makes every distinct blessing a subject of distinct acknowledgment, and no less than twenty-six times in as many short verses ascribes everything to the free and everlasting mercy of his God! Psalm 136. See particularly verse 1, 2, 3, 26. And as David elsewhere calls on every rank and order of society to discharge that debt to God, [Psalm 135:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 135.19-21); [Psalm 150:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 150.1-6), so in our text both "Jerusalem and Zion," both priests and people, are called upon to praise the Lord. Yes, the Psalm both begins and ends with this just requirement, "Praise the Lord; praise the Lord." Let every one among us then stir up his soul to this blessed work; and "let all that is within us bless his holy name."

Let us not however rest in acknowledgments, however devout. There is a more substantial way in which we are bound to praise him, that is, in our lives, "by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days!" This is the union which God himself prescribes, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

#749

GOD'S PEOPLE NEAR UNTO HIM

**[Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14)**

"A people near unto Him." KJV

"The people close to His heart." NIV

The Psalmist, enrapt in ecstasy, is here calling upon the whole creation to praise God. He addresses himself to all creatures in Heaven and in earth, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate—to render to their Creator that honor of which they are capable.

Last of all he addresses "the saints," "whom God has exalted with peculiar honor," to abound in this duty; to which, indeed, they are called far more than even the angels themselves. The angels may well magnify his name, for forming them so holy, for making them so happy, and especially for preserving them from falling; when myriads of other angels, as high and holy and happy as themselves, fell from their first estate, and plunged themselves into irretrievable and endless woe! But the fallen angels cannot speak of Redeeming Love. They know nothing of pardon; of pardon bought with blood; and that blood the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son. They know nothing of a righteousness wrought out for them by God in their own nature; and hence it is observable, that, in Heaven, while the redeemed "stand round about the throne," "the angels stand round about the elders," and consequently at a greater distance from their God.

This was intimated by the admission of the children of Israel into the courts of the Temple; while no Gentile, of whatever rank, or under any pretext whatever, was admitted there, except into the court especially assigned to them. This was intended to shadow forth that spiritual nearness to God which his saints alone can either enjoy or conceive. They alone, of all men, answer to the description given in the text.

I. The saints are near to God by **relation**.

God has from eternity "chosen them in Christ Jesus," and "predestined them to the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself! [Ephesians 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-5)." In due season he called them by his Word, and begat them by the incorruptible seed, the Word of God; so that they are actually "partakers of the divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" and are, in the most strict and comprehensive sense, "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." He has yet further united them by faith to his only-begotten Son; so that they are become one with him, one in nature, "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 one spirit with him too; for "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17)."

Of all this, not one syllable can be spoken by the world at large; it is all the peculiar and exclusive privilege of the saints; who, from having been "strangers and foreigners, like others, have been made fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19)."

II. The saints are near to God by **choice**.

It is certainly true, that "they have not chosen God; but God, in the first instance, chose them, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16)." It is true, also, that they have been "drawn by the Father" himself to the state in which they stand [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44). They have, however, been drawn, 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);" and they have been made "a willing people in the day of God's power [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)."

They no more serve God by compulsion, than they served Satan. They were free agents in their former state; and they are so still. They come to God in Christ, and "offer up their whole selves to him as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God as a reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." They wish to be entirely and altogether his, "sanctified wholly unto him in body, soul, and spirit, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)." Were it in their power, they would have "every thought of their hearts captivated to the obedience of Christ! [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5)."

All this, they would account perfect freedom; it is the freedom and felicity of Heaven; and every approach to it they regard as a Heaven upon earth. Could they attain their perfect wish, every true Christian would be ever with Jesus, and altogether like Him; being as holy as He is holy; and as perfect as He is perfect!

In consequence of this choice, they are also near to him,

III. The saints are near to God by **habit**.

They live as ever in his presence, and as "seeing Him who is invisible, [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27)." When they lie down to rest, they commit themselves altogether to his care. "When they wake in the morning, they are still with him, [Psalm 139:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.18)," and he is present to their minds. With him they hold sweet converse, not only in the stated seasons of prayer, but throughout the day. They "set him always before them;" and "whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do—they do it to the glory of his name." "In him they live and move and have their being." They "walk with him, even as Enoch did, [Genesis 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 5.24);" consulting him in all their doubts, relying on him in all their difficulties, and receiving both good and evil at his hands.

So intimate and continued is their fellowship with him, that "they dwell in God, and God in them; they are one with him, and he with them, [John 6:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.56); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." In a word, "Christ lives in them," and "is their very life;" so that it is "no longer they that live, but Christ who lives in them;" so entirely do "they live the life which they now live in the flesh, by faith in the Son of God, who has loved them, and given himself for them! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)." To them, in a measure is the Paradisiacal state restored; so that "they walk altogether, as it were, in the light of God's countenance, [Psalm 89:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.15)."

Improvement.

1. What cause, then, have the saints for **gratitude**!

Have you been brought to this blessed state? Then remember in what state you once were! You were once as far from God as any of the human race are at this hour; and you would have been as far from him as Hell itself, with an impassable gulf between you, if he had not mercifully interposed by the blood of his Son, and the operations of his Spirit, to prevent it! [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13).

When, therefore, you look at lost men, and see the difference which Divine Grace has made between you, say, 'Why me, Lord? Why me?' You cannot but see that "some are taken, and others left, [Matthew 24:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.40-41);" and you can trace this to no cause but the sovereign grace of God!

Are you then saved? O! admire and adore the grace of God; and let your adoration be such as is observed among the heavenly hosts; they "fall upon their faces," while they sing! [Revelation 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.11). Do likewise; let there be no self-preference or self-delight in you; but let God be magnified, and your souls be abased in the dust!

2. What cause have they, too, for **shame**!

It is surprising that people thus highly favored should ever be found at a distance from God! But the very holiest of men have hearts "bent to backslide from God," and to "start aside, even as a deceitful bow, [Hosea 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.16); [Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.4)." Who among you, brethren, is not sensible of this? You can know little of your own hearts, if you do not see it; and little of God's grace, if you do not bitterly lament it. Ah! be ashamed, that ever your desires after God should languish, or your delight in him abate. Stir up yourselves, brethren, and beg of God to quicken you; that you may correspond fully with the description in my text, and be at all times "a people near to him." See how he complains of you in relation to this matter, "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I would soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. I would have fed them also with the finest of the wheat; and with honey out of the rock would I have satisfied them! [Psalm 81:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.13-14); [Psalm 81:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.16)."

Yes; you cannot but know why it is that your strength is so small, and that your consolations are so few. It is altogether owing to your not walking more closely with God; for, if you were near to him, as you should be, your souls would overflow with all manner of good; according to that promise which he has given, "The faithful man shall abound with blessings! [Proverbs 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.20)."

#750

JOY IN CHRIST

**[Psalm 149:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.2)**

"Let the people of Zion be joyful in their King!"

It appears somewhat strange that a religion coming from Heaven, and purporting to make men happy, should almost universally be considered as a source of melancholy, and as destructive of all personal and social comfort. But it may be easily accounted for. The gospel calls men from the pleasures of sin, and promises them sublimer pleasures in its stead. But unregenerate men, knowing nothing of spiritual joy; they have no idea that any such thing exists; whereas the carnal joys which they are to sacrifice, have afforded them many a delicious feast!

Hence, until, through faith in the divine records, they feel the bitterness of sin, or taste the felicity of God's chosen people, they will and must suppose, that they are called to relinquish what is substantial, and to grasp a shadow. But the saints of old have invariably attested, that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness and peace; and David, who was no incompetent judge of this matter, exhorts every subject of the Redeemer's kingdom to rejoice in Zion's King. We shall,

I. Explain his exhortation.

Who are the people of Zion?

Not every man by nature, seeing we are "children of wrath, [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3)." Not any man by education, since it is beyond the power of man to convey to others such principles and dispositions, as are necessary to bring them into that near relation to the Church of God, [1 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.7). [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13). We must be born from above, through the influence of God's Word and Spirit, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23); and until a supernatural change has been wrought on all the faculties of our souls by God himself, whatever we may profess to be, we are, beyond a doubt, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17). [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5).

Who is their King?

It is to Christ alone that this name belongs, [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.9). He is indeed the King of all the earth, and has the whole creation under his control. But, in this sense many are his subjects who despise his person and hate his government. Whereas over Zion he reigns by the most cordial consent of all his redeemed people, there not being so much as one who does not know him, love him, serve him, and desire the very thoughts of his heart to be subjected to his law. On the other hand, he . . .  
affords them his protection,  
supplies their every need, and  
makes them victorious over all their enemies.  
  
What is their duty towards him?

It is not sufficient that they yield obedience to his will, as slaves to a tyrant whom they fear. They must:  
love his person,  
delight in his commands,  
be zealous for his glory,  
and rely humbly on his care.

In a word, they must rejoice in him. This is essential to the Christian character, [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4); [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3); and, if we attain not to this spirit, we are more inexcusable than the Jews, and liable to a heavier doom, [Deuteronomy 28:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.45); [Deuteronomy 28:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.47).

We do not say indeed that the children of Zion are never to mourn; for mourning is both introductory to joy, and consistent with it; yes, it is even a very necessary ingredient of that joy, which we ought to feel in the contemplation of Christ's character and offices; and the more fervently we love him, the more deeply shall we lament, that our love and joy are so disproportioned to his worth.

The several parts of the exhortation being explained, we shall,

II. Enforce it.

Here each part that has been explained, suggests a powerful argument for rejoicing in Christ. Consider:

1. The **duty** itself.

What can be more pleasant? It is not to any painful duty that we are called, but to rejoice, and to have all the faculties of our souls engaged in the very employment of Heaven. What can be more reasonable? If the gospel furnished us with no grounds of joy, or were as empty and unsatisfying as the world, it would be unreasonable to expect any happiness to flow from it; but it sets before us innumerable occasions of joy; and not only permits, but enjoins, us to bear our part in the felicity of God's chosen people. Shall we not then obey the call?

2. The **object** in whom we are to rejoice.

This is none other than our adorable Emmanuel, who combines in himself all the perfections of the Godhead, and all the excellencies of the most spotless manhood.

Moreover, the love he has manifested towards his subjects, is such as infinitely surpasses our highest conceptions; he assumed our nature, and died for us, while we were in actual rebellion against him! And what a delightful sway does he exercise over them! So light and easy is his yoke, that there is not one of his laws, no, not one, which may not be summed up in this: Be happy! What rewards too does he bestow, not on a few favorites only, but on all his subjects! There is not one of them whom he does not make a king like unto himself, and place upon a throne like unto that on which he himself is seated at the right hand of God, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6). [John 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.3). Shall we refuse to rejoice in such a King as this?

3. The **people** who are called upon to rejoice.

If this exhortation were addressed to the people of this world, they might reply: "We know him not; we see no beauty in him for which he is to be desired; nor have we cause to expect anything at his hands but wrath and fiery indignation; how then shall we rejoice in him?"

But the redeemed know that "he is fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely;" they have experienced the virtue of his blood to purge a guilty conscience, and the efficacy of his grace to sanctify a polluted heart.

For them, he makes continual intercession in the presence of God.

For them, he every moment exercises his almighty power.

For them, he is coming shortly to judge the world, that he may take them to himself, to behold his glory, and participate in his blessedness, forever and ever! Shall they then be reluctant to comply? Surely, if they be, "the very stones must cry out against them! [Luke 19:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.40)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who have never yet rejoiced in Christ.

What relation can you have to Zion? How can it be said of you, This man was born in her? [Psalm 87:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.5-6). And what excuse can you urge before God? Your ignorance of Christ? This is your sin, and not your excuse. He is willing to make you happy under his government, if you will submit yourselves unto him. "Kiss him" then, in token of your reverence and subjection, "lest he be angry, and you perish forever! [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12)."

2. To those who are going on their way rejoicing.

Take care that you make Christ, and not your own frames or feelings, the object and ground of your joy. And guard against pride, self-confidence, and sin of whatever kind, knowing that such things will vitiate and destroy all the happiness of the soul. David's advice must ever be attended to, "Rejoice with trembling! [Psalm 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.11)."

#751

THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS

**[Psalm 149:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.4-7)**

"For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples."

The world is ready to account those weak and enthusiastic who abound in the exercise of spiritual duties; but there is nothing in the universe that more accords with the dictates of reason, than such a state. If God have not given us sufficient grounds to love and serve him, then we may doubt whether the supreme affection of our souls is due to him. But we need go no further than the text in order to justify the warmest expressions of our love to him, and the most unreserved dedication of all our powers to his service.

The exhortations in the text are full of energy; and they are founded on God's love to us. In order therefore to be duly sensible of their force, we must consider:

I. God's kindness to us.

This is expressed both by the internal regard which he bears towards us, and by the outward manifestations of it to our souls.

1. God loves his people.

He esteems them as "his peculiar treasure, [Exodus 19:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.5)." Those who fear God are considered as "his people," in contradistinction to those who belong to Satan, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)."

He has delight in their **persons**, notwithstanding all their vileness; for he views them as "complete in Christ, [Colossians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.10)."

When they are mourning and weeping for their extreme sinfulness, he looks on them with heart-felt delight, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2). [Jeremiah 31:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18); [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20), and delight, [Proverbs 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.20).

Even when they are doubting his love towards them, he marks them as the objects of his tenderest affection and incessant care, [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16).

He takes delight also in their **services**.

Their prayers are his delight, [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8);  
their tributes of praise are esteemed his glory, [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.23);  
their alms are a sacrifice with which he is well pleased, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16);  
their every grace is in his sight of great price, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4).  
Their holy purposes, though not allowed by him to be carried into effect, are noticed by him with approbation, [1 Kings 8:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.18-19);  
nor are even their fainter inclinations, [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13), or their transient thoughts, [Malachi 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16), allowed to pass without a suitable reward.

2. He makes them **lovely**.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Lord's people is, that they are "meek;" their hearts being humbled, their proud impetuous passions are hushed to silence. These the Lord "beautifies with salvation" now.

The lion becomes a lamb, [Isaiah 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.6);  
instead of the brier and thorn, the fir and myrtle-tree spring up, [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.13);  
and even blood-thirsty murderers become humble and loving saints, [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23); [Acts 2:41-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41-47).

The very countenances of God's people often bear a visible mark of the change wrought in them; so that we may almost literally say, "They have the mark of the Lamb on their foreheads! [Revelation 22:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.4)."

There is a beautiful symmetry discernible in all their conduct. "The beauty of the Lord their God is upon them, [Psalm 90:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.17);" and as that consists, not in the exercise of any one perfection, but in a union and harmony of all, however opposite to human appearance; so their beauty is seen, not in the exercise merely of meekness or fortitude, of fear or confidence—but in the just temperament, and combination, of every Christian grace. In a word, they are renewed after God's image, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24); and have the change carried on from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit of the Lord, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

But in an infinitely higher degree will they be beautified, when their salvation shall be complete. Then they shall have no remains of sin or corruption; their bodies shall be made like unto Christ's glorious body, [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21); their souls also shall be without spot or blemish as truly as his, [Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27); arrayed in the robes of his perfect righteousness, and adorned with a crown of glory, [Revelation 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.11); [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14). [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8); they shall shine forth above the sun in the firmament forever and ever! [Daniel 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.3). [Matthew 13:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.43).

And when Christ himself shall come in his glory, he will be admired in them, and glorified in them, [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10).

After viewing the obligations we owe to God, we cannot but be prepared to hear,

II. Our duty to God.

There is a correspondence between the mercies we receive from God—and the service which he requires at our hands.

Does he take delight in us? We should delight ourselves in him.

Does he exert himself to beautify us? We should labor to glorify him.

1. We should ever delight in God.

Those who God has set apart for himself as "his people," and rendered "meek" after the example of Jesus—are properly called "his saints." And though men scoff at that name, and make it a term of reproach, they whom God has honored with it, have reason to rejoice and glory in such an honorable appellation. With them, praise should be . . .  
the subject of their thoughts,  
the language of their lips,  
the very element in which they breathe, [Psalm 33:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.1).

It is their privilege as well as their duty to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice in him evermore, [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4), to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8).

When they rise in the morning, their praise should ascend up as incense; yes, when they are lying "upon their beds," they should have their waking thoughts occupied with God, and "sing aloud" for joy.

Nor should they be contented with the solitary expressions of their love to God; they should commend him to others, and stir up all around them to magnify his name. Such was the delightful employment of the Psalmist, [Psalm 63:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3-6); [Psalm 96:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 96.1-4); and such a devotedness of soul to God is no other than our reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

2. We should fight the Lord's battles.

The Jews were to approve their love to God by extirpating his enemies among the heathen. There are enemies also with whom he requires us to contend; but "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal;" it is not our fellow-creatures that we are called to destroy, but "the lusts that war in our members." The world, the flesh, and the devil, are our enemies, and God's. Against them we vowed eternal enmity; nor are we ever to sheathe the sword until they are all put under our feet. God has prepared for us a divine panoply—an armor of heavenly temper, [Ephesians 6:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.13-17). Clad with this, we must "go forth continually conquering, and to conquer." We must "fight a good fight," and "war a good warfare, [1 Timothy 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.18); [1 Timothy 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.12)," and "endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, [2 Timothy 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.3)."

Thus fighting and singing must be joined together; for "the joy of the Lord is our strength, [Nehemiah 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.10);" and then shall we be most victorious, when we go forth to battle singing the praises of our God! 2 Chronicles 20:21-23.

Address,

1. Those who rest satisfied with a **mere formal religion**.

What suitableness is there in such a state to the temporal mercies we receive at God's hands?

If he calls us to holy joy—should we be cold or lukewarm?

If he commands us to maintain a continual warfare—should we yield ourselves willing captives to our enemies, or make a truce with them for a moment?

Be it known, that whatever the world may think of such a lukewarm state, God utterly abhors it! [Revelation 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16).

2. Those who profess to serve and enjoy God.

Glorious indeed is the salvation to which you are called; and well may you rejoice in it! But oh! be careful also to "walk worthy of it, [Ephesians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1)." If you profess that God has delight in you, take care that you are also adorned and beautified with his divine image. If you rejoice and glory in God, take care also that the sword is ever in your hand, to cut off whatever is displeasing in his sight! [Matthew 18:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.7-9). Beware also lest you decline from the happy state to which you have been brought; beware lest, by cowardice or sloth, you rob your soul of its beauty and happiness, and make him your enemy, who desires nothing so much as to show himself your friend, [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10).

#752

THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD

**[Psalm 150:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 150.6)**

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"

Greatly diversified has David's experience been, as depicted in the Book of Psalms. Sometimes we find him bowed down under a sense of sin, and sometimes sunk almost in the depths of despondency. But here we view him elevated as on Mount Tabor, and breathing, as it were, the very atmosphere of Heaven. It would seem as if all the concluding Psalms had been penned at the close of life, when his soul was altogether ripened for glory. In all the five last Psalms he speaks the language of praise. Every one of them begins and ends with Hallelujah, that is, "Praise the Lord." In the Psalm before us, short as it is, he repeats his exhortation no less than thirteen times. O that he might not repeat it in vain! O that we might "drink into his spirit," and be transported, like him, with love and gratitude, with adoration and thanksgiving!

Be it known, that:

I. God deserves praise from those whom he has made.

What perfection of God is there, which, if duly contemplated, is not a fit subject for praise? His goodness, his mercy, his loving-kindness, his truth, and his faithfulness, call for the loudest praises of all his creatures. The same we may say of his justice too; for though to ungodly men it is a formidable attribute—yet to the creation at large it has a bright and favorable aspect, inasmuch as it is adverse to nothing but what is hostile to the interests of the whole intelligent creation.

But contemplate God in the person of his Son.

Think of him as assuming our nature, and expiating our sins by his own blood upon the cross, and as becoming the living Head of all his believing people—and, finally, as engaged to "perfect that which concerns them," and to preserve them blameless to his heavenly kingdom.

Think of him, I say, in all that he has done and suffered for a ruined world, and in all that he has engaged to do for those who trust in him, and then say, whether the tongues of men and angels are sufficient to declare his goodness, or whether eternity itself will suffice to utter all his praise, [Psalm 106:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.2). Surely it is well and justly said, that "his name is above all blessing and praise! [Nehemiah 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.5)."

II. There is not "a thing that breathes" which has not abundant occasion to praise him.

We speak not of irrational beings (though they do praise him according to their ability;) but of "man, into whose nostrils God originally breathed the breath of life, [Genesis 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.7)." Of all people without exception we say, that they have reason to praise their God. This is true of,

1. Those who are yet in heathen darkness.

Innumerable are the blessings which they enjoy. The constitution of their bodies and the faculties of their souls are fit subjects for adoration and thanksgiving. The various blessings provided for the maintenance and support of man, call also for the most grateful acknowledgments, [Acts 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.17). There is no man whose comforts do not far exceed his deservings.

2. Those who enjoy the light of Scripture Revelation.

Unspeakable are the blessings with which they are favored. The revelation given to the Jews was dark and shadowy; yet that is spoken of as an inestimable benefit conferred upon them, [Deuteronomy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.8). [Nehemiah 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.13-14); what thanks and praise then should we render unto God for the clearer light of his Gospel! O, what wonders of love and mercy are there revealed! How plain is the instruction there given to all who desire to have their feet guided into the way of peace! Whoever perishes for lack of knowledge now, must confess that his desert of condemnation is beyond measure aggravated, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19), and that his destruction arises solely from his contempt of offered mercy.

3. Those who are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ.

What thanks can you ever render to the Lord for the benefits which he has conferred on you?

Think of the extent and magnitude of those blessings.

Think how entirely you owe them to the sovereign grace of God.

Think what a difference is hereby put between you and others, not in this world only, but also in the world to come; and not for time only, but for eternity!

Will not the very stones cry out against you, if you are silent? Methinks your every thought should be adoration and your every word be praise!

We shall need no farther inducement to praise our God, if only we reflect that,

III. The more we abound in sincere praise and worship, the more exalted will our happiness be.

What employment have we for our breath, that can be compared with this? Doubtless there is much happiness in social converse; but this is nothing in comparison with that which is enjoyed in converse with our God. The language of prayer is delightful to every humble soul; but the language of praise is an anticipation and foretaste of Heaven itself! In Heaven there is no other employment, nor will there be to all eternity! [Revelation 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.13). It is not possible for a man to be otherwise than happy while he is blessing and praising God. This is not an occupation in which a mind discontented or disconsolate can engage; there must of necessity be peace, and love, and gratitude, and joy. Yes, in proportion as the praise is ardent, there must be, as the foundation of it, an admiring, an adoring, an overwhelming sense of the Divine goodness!

APPLICATION.

Do not let any of you say, 'This employment is not for me.' It is the duty of "everything that has breath." There is no creature in the universe so afflicted, but he has encouragement to pray, and scope for praise. Some have an idea that nothing but sighing and mourning are suited to their condition; and that the voice of praise and thanksgiving is for those only who have attained a fuller assurance of their acceptance with God. But they might as well say, that gratitude was not their duty, as, that they were not called upon to express their gratitude in the language of praise. Know, brethren, that "whoever offers God praise, glorifies him;" and, his desire is, that every mourning soul should "put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness."

I would not discourage sincere humiliation; for I well know that it should ever be an associate of our sublimest joys; but this I would say to all: That Christ came to "give unto them the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;" and that, in the experience of this, they shall approve themselves "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, in whom he will be glorified."

To every creature then, without exception, whether high or low, rich or poor, old or young, I would say with David in a foregoing Psalm, "Praise the name of the Lord! [Psalm 148:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.11-13)." Yes, fill your heart with grateful praise! "Hallelujah, Hallelujah!"

PROVERBS

The great characteristic of the Psalms is piety  
The great characteristic of the Proverbs is wisdom.

#753

THE NEED OF ATTENDING TO GOD'S GRACIOUS INVITATIONS

**[Proverbs 1:20-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.20-31)**

"Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you-- when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes!"

To expostulate with men respecting their evil ways, to point out the consequences of persisting in them, to urge the necessity of a speedy and thorough conversion to God, and to enforce the address with affectionate entreaties and encouraging assurances, is stigmatized as the effervescence of a heated imagination, the offspring of a weak enthusiastic mind! But, however it is foolishness with men, it is wisdom in the sight of God. No expostulations, entreaties, promises, or threatenings can be delivered with greater energy or affection than those in the text; yet God calls them with the voice, not of folly and enthusiasm, but of "wisdom;" and, whatever we may think of them, they will be found to be "the words of truth and soberness."

We are now "in the chief place of concourse," and it is wisdom itself, or God under the name of Wisdom, that now addresses us. The substance of the address may be comprehended under two general observations:

I. To those who receive his invitations, God will be exceeding gracious.

Nothing can be more tender than the expostulation before us.

The words are addressed not merely to the "simple," but to those who "love simplicity;" not only to the ignorant, but to those who "hate knowledge;" not only to those who are destitute of religion, but who "delight to scoff" at it. What can we suppose that God should say to such daring transgressors? What, but to denounce the heaviest judgments?

But "he is God and not man," and therefore he speaks to them as God, in terms of inconceivable love and mercy, "How long will you love your evil and destructive ways?" Will not "the past time suffice to have followed" them? Have they been so pleasant or profitable that you will forego all the happiness of Heaven for them? or, if you intend to turn away from them, have you fixed the time of your conversion? "How long" do you intend to persist? Until the time of sickness, and the hour of death? or until some more convenient season? Ah! "turn at my reproof;" let the words of a Father and a Friend prevail with you; do not attempt to justify your actions; or to extenuate your guilt; you see clearly enough that your conduct is indefensible. Turn, turn from it without delay!

The **promises**, with which the expostulation is enforced, add greatly to its weight.

A consciousness both of weakness and of ignorance often contributes to keep men under the power of their sins. A thought arises in their minds, 'I do not know how to turn; I do not know how to obtain either the pardon of my sins, or victory over my lusts.'

But God obviates at once all such discouraging reflections. He says in effect, 'Are your corruptions insuperable by any efforts of your own? "I will pour out my Spirit" to sanctify you throughout. Are you at a loss how to obtain my favor? "I will make known to you the words of life;" I will reveal my Son in your heart; I will show you the efficacy of his atonement, and make you wise unto salvation through faith in him.'

Thus does he silence their objections, and dissipate their fears, "Behold, what manner of love is this!" Surely we should not hear of it but with wonder; we should not receive its overtures, but with grateful adoration.

But "God will not always strive with man." On the contrary,

II. Those who despise his invitations, shall be given up to final impenitence and ruin.

The contempt too generally poured upon the mercy of God, is awful in the extreme.

One would suppose that such invitations and promises could not fail of producing the desired effect. But, alas, the reception they meet with is such as God himself represents it. Men "refuse to obey his calls; when he stretches out his hands to them with parental tenderness and importunate entreaties, they will not regard him; they set at nothing his counsel; they despise his reproof; they hate even to hear of their duty, and determine, whatever are the consequence, that they will not perform it."

The zeal and earnestness of his ministers are made a subject of profane ridicule; and the dictates of wisdom are laughed at as the effusions of folly and fanaticism. We appeal to the consciences of all respecting these things. Who that has made any observations on the world around him, or on what passes in his own heart, must not attest that these things are so? Yes; we are all guilty, "This has been our manner from our youth."

Some have been more open and notorious, and others more secret and reserved, in their oppositions to God's will. But all have opposed it, and, if divine grace has not slain our enmity, we are opposing it still; the deliberate sentiment of every unregenerate man is like theirs of old, "As for the Word which you have spoken unto us in the name of the Lord—we will not hearken unto you! [Jeremiah 44:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16)."

But such obstinant conduct, if persisted in, will one day meet a suitable recompense.

As God cannot be deceived, so neither will he be mocked. If he has a day of grace, so has he also a day of vengeance; and that day is hastening on apace. However secure the sinner may think himself, there is an hour of "desolation, and of consequent distress and anguish coming upon him!" Perhaps it may come in this life; on a dying bed he may be filled with terror and remorse; and though, like Judas, he may confess his sin, or, like Esau, pray for a revocation of his sentence, his prayers may be cast out, and God laugh at his calamity! Often does God threaten this, and often has he executed his threatening, "Go to your gods whom you have chosen," said he to his people of old; let them deliver you; for I will deliver you no more!

He has threatened it, [Micah 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 3.4). [Jeremiah 2:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.27-28).

And he has executed it, [Zechariah 7:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 7.11-13). [Judges 10:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.13-14)."

So now does he often suggest to the mind of an awakened, but unconverted sinner, 'What will the world do for you now? What will your pleasures, your riches, or your honors profit you in this day of my wrath? What do you think of the seed which you have been sowing, now you begin to reap the fruit thereof?'

But if God deals not with us thus in this world, most assuredly he will in the world to come. That will indeed be an hour of distress and anguish when these despisers of mercy shall stand at the tribunal of their Judge; and oh! how will he then "laugh at their calamity! how will he mock at all their fear" and terror! 'You would not believe my Word; now see whether it is true or not. You would not be persuaded that I would ever vindicate my insulted Majesty; What do you think of that matter now? You despised me, and said, "Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your ways!" You shall have your request; I will depart from you; and you too shall depart from me. Depart accursed one, into everlasting fire! And though you should pray to all eternity for a mitigation of your pain, you shall never have so much as a drop of water to cool your tongue.'

Would to God that men would realize these things, and be persuaded to believe that God is true! But whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear—we must declare what God has spoken; and, however an ignorant world may deride it as folly, we will aver it to be the "counsel of true wisdom," and the declaration of an unerring God!

APPLICATION.

1. Let all adore God's **goodness**.

Which of us must not plead guilty to the charge of despising God? Which of us has not persevered in a course of disobedience to him in spite of all his messages of mercy; and that too, not for days merely, but for months and years? Yet has God exercised forbearance towards us; and at this very instant renews to us his gracious invitations. Let us consider how many thousands have been cut off in their sins, while we are yet spared to hear the tidings of salvation; and "let the patience and long-suffering of God lead us to repentance." Let us magnify him for such distinguished favors; and turn to him "today, while it is called today, lest he swear in his wrath that we shall never enter into his rest."

2. Let all tremble at God's **justice**.

Though God be so full of compassion, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live," yet is he a just and sin-avenging God, "he will by no means clear the guilty! [Exodus 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.7)." He sometimes "repays the wicked to their face" even in this life; but there is a day which he has appointed for the full display of his own righteousness; a day, wherein he will render to every man according to his deeds; to those, who have sought for immortality, eternal life. But to the despisers of his truth, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, [Romans 2:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.6-9).

Let us then get our minds impressed with this thought, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! [Hebrews 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.31); and let us instantly comply with his invitations here, that we may be partakers of his promises in the eternal world.

#754

THE WAY OF ATTAINING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

**[Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6)**

"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding!"

Wisdom is justly considered as the first of human attainments. It is that which elevates us in the scale of being, and to it we are indebted for all the most refined comforts of civilized society. But there is a spiritual wisdom totally distinct from that which is merely intellectual, and as much superior to it both in its qualities and effects, as reason is superior to instinct. What this is, and how it is to be attained, we are informed by Solomon in the words before us. Let us then consider,

I. Wherein true wisdom consists.

The nature of true wisdom is plainly declared in the text.

That which in one verse is called, "Wisdom," and "Understanding," in a subsequent verse is called, "The fear of the Lord," and "The knowledge of God."

The wisdom which unregenerate men possess, resides only in the head.

But that true wisdom of which the text speaks is seated in the heart.

The former consists merely in a knowledge of men and things, with a faculty of applying that knowledge to present circumstances.

The latter consists in a knowledge of God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, together with a correspondent fear and love of his name.

The former enlarges the mind, and directs the conduct in things relating to time.

The latter informs and regulates the soul, and directs the conduct in reference to eternity.

This description is just and accurate.

We confess that the knowledge and fear of God is not so reputed by the world; on the contrary, it is stigmatized as folly and madness. But that worldly wisdom which arrogates to itself an exclusive title to the appellation of wisdom, is by no means so deserving of it as this; because, whatever excellencies it possesses, its operations are weak, uncertain, transient. Whereas "the wisdom that is from above" brings into subjection every rebellious passion, and progressively prepares us for the enjoyment of our God. It was with this wisdom that the Messiah himself was endued, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3). And it is of this wisdom that Solomon speaks, when he declares that nothing else is worthy the name of wisdom, [Proverbs 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 9.10).

Respecting wisdom the text further informs us,

II. By what means true wisdom is to be attained.

The wisdom of this world may be gained by study alone.

But spiritual wisdom requires:

1. Sincerity.

If a man has not a disposition to obey the Word of God, he will find occasion of cavil and dispute in the plainest expressions. The Pharisees of old, though conversant with the sacred writings, and instructed by our Lord himself, remained ignorant of the truth, because "they loved darkness rather than light." Thus it will be with us. However good the seed that is sown may be, it will never bring forth fruit to perfection, unless it is "received into a honest and good heart."

If we would be truly wise, we must imitate the docility of Cornelius [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33); or, in the language of the text, we must "receive God's Word, and hide his commandments with us," as an inestimable jewel which we are solicitous to possess and keep.

2. Diligence.

This idea is strongly inculcated in the words before us, "we should incline our ear, and apply our heart to understanding, and seek it as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures." We should consider the inspired volume as an inexhaustible mine, which yields nothing to a superficial observer, but will richly repay those who explore its inmost recesses. To this effect was the direction given to Joshua, [Joshua 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.8); and if we follow that advice, we shall succeed like the Bereans of old [Acts 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11). It is the diligent hand, and that only, that can ever make us rich.

3. Prayer.

Nothing will succeed without prayer. A man might commit to memory the whole Bible, and yet not understand one spiritual truth contained it, if he trusted in his own powers, instead of looking up to God for the teaching of his Spirit. Our blessed Lord assures us, that none knows the Father, but he to whom the Son shall reveal him, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27). And this also is intimated in the repeated direction given us in the text, to "cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding." The Apostles themselves needed to have "their understandings opened, before they could understand the Scriptures, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45)." Yes, established Christians still need "a spirit of wisdom and revelation to be given" to them, in order to their obtaining a more just view of revealed truths, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18). All of us therefore, if we would be taught by God, must cry with David, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law! [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18)."

For the encouragement of all, Solomon further declares,

III. The certain outcome of those means.

God is the source and giver of all spiritual knowledge.

Nothing can be more positive than the assertion before us. That "God gives wisdom, and that out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding." It is in this view that he is called, "The Father of lights, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17);" because as that bright luminary, the sun, was the work of his hands—so all light, intellectual or spiritual, is derived from him.

Human learning gives a man no advantage towards the attainment of true wisdom. All, under God, depends on the state of mind with which men seek divine knowledge; if they are willing to "learn of the Father, [John 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.15)," he will teach them. But if they are too proud to submit to his instructions, he will leave them to wander further and further from the right way. He will "take the wise in their own craftiness, [1 Corinthians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.19); [1 Corinthians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.19)," and "reveal to babes what he hides from the wise and prudent, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)."

Nor will he allow us to use the appointed means in vain.

Frequent are the assurances which God has given us respecting this, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9); [Psalm 25:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.12); [Psalm 25:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.14). And he has made distinct promises to each of the foregoing means.

Are we sincere? He will open our eyes, [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17).

Are we diligent? He will reveal himself to us, [Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.17).

Are we importunate in prayer? He will give us liberally, and without upbraiding, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5).

No lack of learning, no weakness of intellect on our part, shall be any obstacle to him, or deprive us of the benefits which we seek [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8). On the contrary, he will make use of the weakest and most contemptible of men, to confound the wise and mighty, [1 Corinthians 1:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.27-28).

INFERENCES.

1. How highly should we value the Gospel!

Men spend much time and money in acquiring human knowledge, and are glad to avail themselves of all lectures, public or private, whereby they may gain instruction. But a frequent ministration of divine ordinances, and a faithful dispensation of God's Word, are deemed worthy of censure rather than of approbation. The very people for whose benefit the Word is preached, can scarcely be prevailed upon to lend an ear to the instruction that is freely offered. Little do they think what it is that they thus despise. The ordinances are appointed of God for the express purpose of "converting souls, and making wise the simple, [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12). [Psalm 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7)."

How many are there now in Heaven, who would have "perished for lack of knowledge," if the voice of God in his ministers had not reached their hearts, and "brought them out of darkness into marvelous light, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." Let all then improve the ordinances with diligence, and pray that by means of them they may be "made wise unto salvation, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2). [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1)."

2. How precious should the Scriptures be in our sight!

It is only at certain seasons that we can attend on public ordinances; but the Scriptures we may read at all times. In them is contained all that we need to know. And the Holy Spirit is promised to guide us into all truth, [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13). [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). Let the sacred volume then be our delight, and our meditation all the day! [Psalm 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.2). Let us not cavil at any part of it, or say, This is a hard saying, [John 6:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.60). But let us receive it with meekness, knowing that, if it is engrafted in our hearts, it is able, and shall be effectual, to save our souls, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21).

#855

PIETY A PRESERVATIVE FROM EVIL

**[Proverbs 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.10-11)**

"For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you!"

Piety, more than any other thing whatever, is regarded with jealousy and suspicion; and it is a common thing for parents to guard their children against its advocates and professors, as they would against people infected with a contagious disease! What the fruit of this folly, both in parents and children too, generally is, may be easily conceived. The children, taught to dread piety, which alone could preserve them from evil, become the victims of temptation, and fall into every species of iniquity! And the parents frequently are bowed down by the misconduct of their children, until their grey hairs are brought with sorrow to the grave!

Men vainly hope to effect that by moral persuasion, which nothing but the grace of God can produce; they would have fruit without a root, and blamelessness without any fixed principle of piety in the soul. But the only way in which any man can be kept in one uniform path of goodness and of honor, is by submitting his soul to the influence of true religion, and surrendering himself up unreservedly to God.

This at least was the conviction of Solomon's mind, "For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you!" By "wisdom and knowledge" we are not to understand worldly wisdom; for a proficiency in that, however great it may be, is no pledge of morality, nor preservative from sin. These terms are used in Scripture to express genuine piety; and it is that alone which will prove a sufficient antidote to temptation, or become a perennial source of holiness in the life!

In confirmation of this sentiment, I will show,

I. What reception divine truth should meet with.

The heart is the proper seat of divine knowledge.

Worldly knowledge is seated in the head, and is acquired by deep study, and by force of intellect; nor, in whatever degree it is attained, does it at all sanctify and renew the soul.

But the truth of God "enters into the heart;" there is that "incorruptible seed" deposited; and from thence is it brought forth into life and action. I do no mean to say, that the understanding is not to be exercised, or exercised deeply, in relation to divine truth; for, beyond all doubt, every truth must so far approve itself to our judgment, as evidently to appear worthy of God, and suited to our condition.

Nor should any man give an unrestrained scope to his imagination or affections; for, if he were implicitly to follow them, he would of necessity be led away from the solid maxims of the Gospel. But when once he is convinced of any truth of God, then is he to deliver up his affections to be molded and directed by it.

To make this clear, let me state what I mean by divine knowledge.

The Word of God teaches us that sin is an evil of extreme malignity; that, to every soul in which it reigns, it is defiling, debasing, and damming!

It teaches us that we are altogether incapable of cancelling its guilt, or of subduing its power; and that if we have not a Savior who is able to effect these things for us, we must inevitably and eternally perish!

It teaches us yet further, that the Lord Jesus Christ is precisely such a Savior as we need, and that he is both "able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

Still further, it teaches us the beauty of holiness, and the blessedness of serving and enjoying God!

But of what use are those things as a mere theory? It is only by spiritual truths being actually experienced in the soul that they can be productive of any solid benefit. But, when truly received into the heart, they set in motion all the affections of the soul, and call into activity our fears and our hopes, our sorrows and our joys.

Truth should be received in the heart with supreme delight.

Truth of any kind is pleasing to the mind, as all who are accustomed to the investigations of science can attest. But divine truth should generate the sublimest joy; or, as my text expresses it, should be "pleasant to the soul." It should be to us what light is to the wandering and benighted traveler; he pants for it; and encourages himself on the very first appearance of its orient dawn. To him it comes as a remedy that is suited to his most urgent necessities.

Conceive of the Israelites, when pressed with hunger, or perishing with thirst—with what interest must they have beheld the manna that was showered about their tents! And with what avidity must they have bowed down to drink of the streams that issued from the rock!

Or, if it is said that these things are objects of sense, and therefore inapplicable to the point in hand—then take the instance of the bronze serpent, which was exhibited to their faith. They felt themselves dying of the wounds which had been inflicted by the fiery serpents; they were perfectly conscious that no physician on earth could help them; and they were informed, that, by God's appointment, a bronze serpent had been erected, in order that, by looking to that, they might be restored to health.

Would they hear of that with skeptical indifference, or behold it with uninterested curiosity? No! It would be to them a matter of life and death; the very first tidings of such an instrument would make them eager for the exposure of it to their view; and when they saw or heard others attesting its efficacy, they would look to it with a desire to experience in themselves its healing power. Now this is the way in which divine truth should be viewed by us.

To the ungodly world, gospel truth is most unwelcome, because it bears testimony against them, and against all their ways; hence "they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved."

But to us it should be an object of ardent desire and supreme delight. We should look to it, not for the purpose of critical discussion, but of grateful application to the soul.

Our spirit should be precisely that of the blind man whom Jesus had healed. Our Lord put the question to him, "Do you believe on the Son of God?" To which he replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? [John 9:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.35-36)." Here he finds no disposition to speculate upon the subject, as on a matter of mere critical inquiry; but shows a readiness to admit the truth the moment it should be revealed to him, and to embrace it as the one ground of all his future conduct.

Such should be the disposition of our minds also. And when we have attained clearer views of divine truth, we should "rejoice as one that finds great spoil! [Psalm 119:162](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.162)."

That we may be stirred up to seek divine truth in this way, let us consider,

II. Its beneficial influence when duly received.

"Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you!" This is the testimony of God himself. But it may be asked, 'If common knowledge is not effectual to keep us, or even divine knowledge when received only into the head—then how can the circumstance of receiving knowledge into the heart be productive of any such effect?' I answer: It is this very circumstance which makes all the difference:

Knowledge of spiritual truth when it resides merely in the head is speculative only.

Whereas, when it enters into the heart, it becomes practical.

1. Heart knowledge of spiritual realities **rectifies the judgment**.

On every subject connected with the soul, the judgment of mankind is in direct opposition to the mind of God.

In their eyes, the things of time and sense are of the first importance. But in the sight of God they are all lighter than vanity itself! In God's eyes, the concerns of the soul and of eternity are alone worthy of the care of an immortal being.

To the ungodly, even the Gospel itself, that unrivaled production of divine wisdom, is "foolishness!" But to an enlightened mind, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation!

To the stout-hearted infidel, to follow the commands of God would be torture! But to one who is taught of God, obedience to God's commands appears his highest honor and happiness. The truth is, he once was in darkness, but is now "brought into marvelous light;" he once saw only through the distorting medium of sense; he now beholds with the eye of faith, which brings him within the veil of the sanctuary, and discovers everything as it is beheld by God himself.

Nor should this appear strange to us.

The difference made in the desire for any object, is made by its being viewed through glasses of different colored lenses. This may easily convince us how different an appearance every object must assume, according as it is viewed through the medium of sense, or by the penetrating eye of faith.

The person who turns to God has the very law of God written in his heart; and needs only to look within, and he will see the correspondence between the divine records and his own actual experience; so that he does not merely believe the divine testimonies to be true and good, but "has within himself a witness" of their transcendent excellence; or, as it is said in the verse before our text, "he understands righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yes, every good path."

2. Heart knowledge of spiritual realities **infuses sensibility into the conscience**.

The conscience of an unenlightened man is blind, partial, and in many respects fully seared; since, in relation to the dispositions of the soul towards God, which is of far greater importance than anything else, it never reproves at all. But when divine wisdom has entered into his soul, a man will not be satisfied with a freedom from great and flagrant transgressions. He will examine his duties towards God as well as those towards man. He will mark his defects, no less than his excesses. He will observe his thoughts, yes, and "the very imaginations of his thoughts;" and will be more grieved for an evil propensity or desire, than the world at large are for an evil act! He endeavors to have his conscience as much alive to the least evils, as to the greatest; and to keep it tender, as the apple of his eye; and if but a mote assails it, he will take no rest, until he has wept it out with tears of penitence and contrition!

See this in the Apostle Paul. Before his conversion, he could find no evil in himself, though he was "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious;" but after his conversion, he did but utter a disrespectful word to a judge who was violating the plainest rules of justice, and he made it a matter of humiliation in the presence of the whole court.

3. Heart knowledge of spiritual realities **instills a watchfulness against the occasions of evil**.

Those who are destitute of vital godliness will venture themselves any where, without fear and without remorse; but a man of real piety will be afraid to expose himself where the objects around him present only what has a tendency to vitiate his mind. He prays to God "not to lead him into temptation;" and therefore he will not voluntarily run into it.

He will select his associates from among the excellent of the earth, who will forward, rather than retard, the growth of holy affections within him. And, as far as his situation will admit of it, he will "come out from the ungodly world, and be separate, and not even touch an impure thing," lest he be corrupted. "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character! [1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.33)."

This is very particularly insisted on in the following context, in reference both to evil men and evil women. It is said in [Proverbs 2:11-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.11-20), Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways. It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life. Thus you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous!"

Here the conduct of evil men is drawn to the very life, as is the character of the evil woman also, against both of whom the man of piety will be strictly on his guard, proposing to himself the example of the godly, and availing himself of their aid in his walk before God. He knows, that "he cannot take fire in his bosom, without being burned;" and therefore he will use the utmost possible circumspection in the whole of his deportment.

The books, the company, the conversation that would defile his mind, he carefully avoids; and, like the Jews at the time of the Passover, he searches the most secret recesses of his soul, to sweep from it the leaven that would offend his God!

4. Heart knowledge of spiritual realities **leads us continually to God for direction and support**.

Without divine aid all human efforts are vain. But the Word of God clearly, fully, constantly directs us to look to him, and an experience of it in our own souls will convince us of the necessity of crying to him continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe." It is in this way chiefly that divine wisdom preserves us. The soundness of our principles may prescribe what is right; and our love to those principles may incline us to the performance of it; but divine grace alone can ever prove effectual for us. No "power, but that which raised Jesus Christ himself from the dead," will be sufficient to carry on within us the work that has been begun.

On the other hand, if we really trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall, "through his strength, be able to do all things!" "Nor shall anything ever prevail to separate us from his love!"

Having illustrated the great truth in our text, we would further improve it, by suggesting,

1. In what spirit we should **read** and **hear** the Word.

We should not come to the house of God in a mere customary manner, for example sake, or to perform a duty, and still less to be amused with what we hear. But, as Cornelius and his friends, when Peter came to minister unto them, said, "Now are we all here before God, to hear all things that are commanded you by God"—so should we come up to the house of God to "hear what the Lord our God shall say concerning us."

We should come to learn our duty—in order that we may practice it.

We should bless our God that so sublime a privilege is accorded to us.

We should come as a patient to receive the counsels of his physician, with a determination of heart to follow his prescriptions.

We should come as a mariner, if among shoals and quick-sands, does not consult his chart and compass for amusement, or with a disposition to dispute their testimony, but with a desire to have every mistake rectified, and to navigate his ship through the dangerous passage, agreeably to their direction.

O! when will Christian assemblies meet in this frame? When will God's ordinances be thus improved for their proper end? Brethren, only reflect on the office of true wisdom, as delineated in the passage before us and you will never lack either a direction or a motive for a profitable attendance on the means of grace.

2. With what care we should **improve** the Word.

The Word we read and hear will judge us in the last day; and if we do not take occasion from it to follow the counsels of the Most High, we shall greatly aggravate our guilt before God. The Word we hear, if it prove not "a savor of life unto life, will become to us a savor of death unto death." The lessons of wisdom had better never have been delivered to us, than be allowed to pass away without a suitable improvement of them.

Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that if he had not come and spoken unto them, that they would not have had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin.

And so must I also say unto you: All that you have heard respecting the evil of sin, the sufficiency of Christ, the beauty of holiness—of what use will it be to you, if it does not . . .  
humble you as sinners,  
encourage you as penitents,  
and animate you as believers?

I beg you, do not neglect the day of your visitation, nor "hold the truth in unrighteousness;" but receive the truth in the love of it; and deliver your souls into it as a mold, that it may fashion you after the image of your God!

Never imagine that you have got above the use of ordinances, or that it is of no profit to attend upon them; they are the golden pipes through which, to your last hour, you must receive the golden oil into your lamps; and through the supplies of the Spirit which you may receive by them, you may hope that your path shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

#756

BENEFITS OF TRUE WISDOM

**[Proverbs 2:10-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.10-22)**

"For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways. It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life. Thus you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it."

Whether we regard Solomon as a saint walking with his God, or as a backslider restored to God—we must consider him as pre-eminently qualified to give advice for the regulation of our conduct. For, as a saint—he was endued with wisdom above all men. And, as a backslider—he had a wider range for his wickedness, and a deeper experience of its folly, than any other person ever possessed.

Under the character of "wisdom," he here speaks of true religion; which he recommends to all, but especially to people in early life; and, in order to impress his advice the more deeply on our minds, he sets before us:

I. The benefits derived from true wisdom.

When once true religion is deeply rooted in the heart, it will render us the most essential services.

1. True religion will **keep us from the society of ungodly men**.

There are many whose delight is in wickedness; they have departed from God themselves, and have "made crooked paths for themselves;" in which they proceed with all imaginable vileness and perverseness. Disdaining to receive any light from God or his Word, they "walk in utter darkness, not at all knowing where they are going, verse 13 with [1 John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.11)."

Not content with casting off all restraint themselves, and walking after their own lusts in all manner of impurity—they wish to draw all whom they can along with them. They deride all serious piety, and labor to the uttermost to turn aside from the way of godliness, any who may be inclined to it! They rejoice to do evil, and if they can but succeed in their efforts to ensnare a person who has been fleeing from sin, and to divert him from following after God—not even Satan himself will exult more than they!

Now from such companions true religion will preserve us. We shall see at once how far they are from God, and how impossible it is to be happy in their society, "for what fellowship can righteousness have with unrighteousness; or light with darkness; or Christ with Belial; or he who believes with an unbeliever! [2 Corinthians 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-15)." Instead of seeking their society, therefore, we shall come out from among them, and be separate! [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17);" and not have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11)."

2. True religion will **keep us from the snares also of ungodly women**.

It is lamentable to think how degraded human nature is, and how assimilated to the very beasts multitudes are, who were originally formed in the image of their God. Females, married, as well as unmarried, "forsaking the husband of their youth and the covenant of their God," will abandon themselves to the most vile courses, soliciting the embrace of men to whom they are utter "strangers," and practicing every species of artifice, to ensnare and corrupt all who come in their way!

And such is their influence over those whom they have once ensnared, that it is a miracle almost if even one is recovered to a sense of his duty, and is brought back again in penitential sorrow to his God! verse 19. Truly their ways lead down to death and to Hell! [Proverbs 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.3-5); [Proverbs 7:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 7.26-27). For not only do they draw men from all thoughtfulness about their souls, but they bring them into corruptions and crimes, which frequently end in suicide, or death by the hands of the public executioner.

But from these also, will vital piety preserve us. It will lead us to use all the precautions against them, that a prudent government employs against the infection of the plague. We shall have no communication with people whose very presence will endanger the life of our souls. We shall not go near their houses, or the places of their resort, [Proverbs 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.8). We shall not parley with temptation when it comes in our way; but shall flee from it, as Joseph did, saying, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God! [Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9)."

3. True religion will **guide us in the paths of righteousness and peace**.

When once true religion enters into the soul, we shall take the Scriptures for our guide, and endeavor to walk in the paths which all the holy men of old have trod before us, verse 20. We shall not be satisfied with following the customs of those around us, or with conforming to the standard of duty which the world approves. We shall desire to be as "holy, as God is holy;" and shall determine through grace to "perfect holiness in the fear of God".

Such being the effects of true wisdom, I will proceed to point out to you,

II. The vast **importance** of seeking after true religion.

Both the promises and threatenings of the Mosaic law were chiefly of a temporal nature; the people who served God faithfully being encouraged to expect peace and plenty in the land of Canaan; while those who were disobedient to his laws were to be visited with war, famine, pestilence, and ultimately to be driven out of that land, as the Canaanites had been before them.

But under these figures, truths of far higher consequence were veiled; and the present and eternal states of men were shadowed forth as indissolubly connected with their moral and religious character. Hence the contrast drawn between the sentence accorded to "the upright" and "the wicked" in the concluding verses of our text, must be understood as referring to:

1. Their respective states **in this world**.

"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)." Certainly in this world there is an immense "difference between those who serve God, and those who serve him not, [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18)."

We readily grant that the ungodly and profane may prosper in respect of outward things, and that the saints may be in a state of degradation and oppression, [Psalm 73:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3-10). But there is no comparison between the real happiness of the one and of the other; the ungodly are "like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt! [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21)." They are agitated by many ungovernable and conflicting passions; their tempers are a source of continual disquietude, [Romans 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.16-17); and they have no inward resources to calm the tumult of their minds.

But the godly have consolations peculiar to themselves, and abundantly sufficient to counterbalance their afflictions. They have a God to go unto—a God, who says, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you." The very tribulations which they endure for righteousness sake, are to them a ground of glorying! [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3); and the light of God's countenance lifted up upon their souls with joy and peace, even with "a joy that is unspeakable," and "a peace that surpasses all understanding."

If then we look no further than to this present life, we do not hesitate to declare that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding! [Job 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.28)."

2. Their respective states **in the world to come**.

"There is a rest which remains for the people of God, [Hebrews 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.9)"—a rest, into which the true Joshua shall introduce them, as soon as ever they shall have completed the period fixed for their abode in this dreary wilderness; and there shall they "remain" forever; there shall they be as "pillars in the temple of their God and shall never leave, verse 21 with [Revelation 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.12)."

But how shall I represent their happiness in that place where there will be no remains of those evils which they experienced in this world, [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4); and where every blessing which they here sought for, shall be imparted to the utmost extent of their desires, and of their capacities for enjoyment! [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11).

On the other hand, there is a day of retribution for the ungodly, when they shall not only be "convinced of all their ungodly deeds which they have wickedly committed, and of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against the Lord and his ways, but will have judgment executed upon them" by the Judge of the living and the dead! [Jude 15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jude 15). And what words can ever suffice to give an adequate idea of their misery, when, driven from the presence of their God, and from the congregation of his saints, [Psalm 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.5). [Luke 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.28). They shall be consigned to those regions of misery, where they will take their portion in "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone," and "dwell forever with everlasting burnings!"

If men would but reflect one moment on these consequences of their impiety, there would be no longer any occasion to discourse on the wisdom of seeking after God, or the folly of provoking his displeasure by a life of sin!

APPLICATION:

1. Let us learn to form a right estimate of true religion.

True religion is wisdom, even though the whole world should combine to call it folly.

2. Let us learn to seek true religion in due measure.

To receive it into the head is to little purpose; the proper seat of it is the heart. Nor is it sufficient that we yield a constrained obedience to it—its service should in our estimation be accounted perfect freedom. It is only "when wisdom enters into our heart, and knowledge it pleasant to our soul," that we can be said to have received the grace of God in truth.

The worldly man is at home in the world—it is his element wherein he moves. And such must religion be to the child of God—his rest, his element, his delight.

3. Let us learn to let true religion have its full operation on our souls.

Wherever true wisdom is, "Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you, [Proverbs 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.11)." We conceive this observation to be deserving of peculiar attention; because the indiscretions of religious people are rarely traced to their proper source—a lack of right dispositions in the heart.

Where meekness, and modesty, and faith, and humility reside in the heart—there will be a corresponding propriety of conduct in the life.

But where pride, and conceit, and forwardness, and self-will are predominant, there will the deportment savor of these hateful qualities in all our interactions with mankind.

There is this remarkable difference between human wisdom and that which is divine: human wisdom leaves the heart untouched, or even administers fuel to its corruptions. But divine wisdom "pours the very soul into the mold of the Gospel, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17)." and assimilates all its dispositions to the image of God himself.

It was not Paul's eminence in intellectual attainments that made him so eminent in Christian virtues—it was the abundance of God's grace that rendered him so fruitful in every good word and work; and, if the grace of God abounds in us, then we also shall proportionality adorn the Gospel in the whole of our life and conversation.

Let that then be remembered which Solomon has told us, "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence, [Proverbs 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.12);" and let us be careful that we do not by any indiscreet conduct give "occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Our determination, through grace, must be, to cut off from the world all unnecessary occasion of offence. We must not imagine that our separation from an ungodly world gives us a licence to violate either the duties or the charities of life. But while we "abstain from all appearance of evil," we must cultivate to the uttermost not only "whatever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure—but whatever things are lovely and of good report, [Philippians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.8)." We must labor to "behave ourselves wisely in a holy way! [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)."

#757

CONFIDENCE IN GOD ENCOURAGED

**[Proverbs 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.5-6)**

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and do not lean unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct your paths!"

The book of Proverbs is not so much designed to open to us the way of salvation, as it is to regulate our conduct after we have attained a saving knowledge of the truth. It abounds with maxims admirably calculated to assist us in our fellowship with men, and with instructions also relative to our walk before God. Of this latter kind is the advice given us in the words which we have just read; wherein we see,

I. The confidence which God requires of us.

As creatures, we are of necessity dependent on Him who first gave us our existence; for in him we live, and move, and have our being. But it is by no means sufficient for us to acknowledge this as a truth which we cannot controvert; we must acquiesce in it as a state that we approve, and glory in it as our highest privilege. Our confidence in God must be co-extensive with our necessities.

1. Our confidence in God must be **entire**.

We must trust in the Lord "with all our heart." There must be no aversion to such an appointment as unnecessary, no distrust of it as insufficient. We should view ourselves as utterly incapable of ensuring our own happiness; and we should regard God as engaged to order everything for our good. We should not for a moment doubt his wisdom to discern what shall eventually prove best for us, nor his power to execute it, however great or numerous the difficulties may be which appear to obstruct its accomplishment.

Nay, we must be persuaded that his love delights in caring for us, and that his truth and faithfulness will perform all that in his unbounded mercy he has undertaken in our behalf.

From this conviction we must commit all our concerns to him, to be ordered and overruled as he in his infinite wisdom shall see best. There must be an actual transfer of them if we may so speak into his hands, and a full conviction of mind that he is able to keep, and will assuredly keep, what we have so committed to him, so as to bring all our affairs to a blessed and successful outcome, [Psalm 37:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.5) with [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12). "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)."

2. Our confidence in God must be **exclusive**.

We must "not lean to our own understanding," so as to rely on it for anything. We are to use our understanding indeed, but not to transfer to it any measure of that dependence which should be placed on God alone. We know not what would be the ultimate outcome of anyone thing. We are ready to suppose that whatever obstructs our wishes for a time, will endanger their final accomplishment; whereas God often makes those very events subservient to his own gracious purposes, and uses them as means whereby his ends shall be fulfilled.

This was remarkably the case with Joseph in all his trials; and there is no true believer who will not acknowledge, that in his own experience many things which have been desired by him would have proved injurious, and many things which have been deprecated by him have been overruled for his welfare. From a full conviction that "a man's way is not in himself, and that it is not in man that walks to direct his steps, [Jeremiah 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.23)," we must renounce all idea of planning for ourselves, any further than in an entire dependence on the divine guidance and direction. We are surely to use all proper means for attaining what on the whole appears most desirable; but the relying on our own devices, as calculated of themselves to ensure success, is the thing which God has marked with his strongest disapprobation, [Isaiah 22:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.8-11). See also [Isaiah 30:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.1-3); [Isaiah 31:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.1-3). The doing of this demonstrates our folly, [Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26), and exposes us to the heaviest curse, [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-6). We must therefore altogether "cease from our own wisdom, [Proverbs 23:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.4)."

3. Our confidence in God must be **uniform**.

"In all our ways we must acknowledge him;" not only in those ways which seem to be of greater importance, but in all things without exception. It is not in the rise and fall of empires alone that God's hand is to be viewed, but in the falling of a sparrow, or in any event equally insignificant. We are apt to consider some things as important, and others as unimportant; but the truth is, that in God's sight nothing is important (except as it may advance his glory); nor is there anything unimportant as it relates to us. Many things which in their effects and consequences have been of the greatest imaginable importance, may in their origin be traced to the slightest possible occurrence! If we look into the book of Esther, we shall see this observation confirmed in its utmost extent. Nor is God to be acknowledged only in those events which would be deemed small, but in those also which are casual, or, as we call them, accidental, "the lot (than which nothing is more casual) is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord." In everything therefore, whether great or small, painful or pleasant, planned or incidental, God must be acknowledged as having sent it, if past, and as having the entire disposal of it, if future.

To place this entire confidence in God will be found our truest wisdom, if we consider,

II. The encouragement which God gives us to trust in him.

Wonderful is the promise here given for our encouragement, "He shall direct our paths." But how will he direct us? Will he speak to us in dreams, or visions, or by Urim and Thummim, or by an audible voice? Or will he go before us in the pillar and the cloud, as he did before his people in the wilderness? or answer us, as he did David, in reference to the men of Keilah, and the Amalekites? [1 Samuel 23:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.4); [1 Samuel 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 11.12); [1 Samuel 30:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.8). No; we are not authorized to expect anything of the kind; yet will he direct us sufficiently to preserve us from any material error,

1. God will direct us by his **Spirit**.

To "open the eyes of our understanding" is one of the most important offices of the Spirit; and, in doing this, he will purge away from our eyes that film which obstructs our sight. Pride, passion, self-interest, and a thousand other things, incapacitate us for a clear and perfect discovery of our duty; and, until these are mortified, we are constantly exposed to the most awful delusions; we are ready at all times to "call good evil, and evil good; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness."

But when our minds are duly enlightened, we see things in their proper colors. On different occasions, when the apostles would have called fire from Heaven to consume a Samaritan village, and when they contended with each other who would be the greatest, our blessed Lord instructed them better; and so will he do with us, bringing to our remembrance some portion of God's Word which bears upon the point in hand.

Thus he fulfills that blessed promise, "that we shall hear a word behind us, saying. This is the way, walk in it! when we would otherwise have turned either to the right hand or to the left, [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)." We do not say, that the Holy Spirit does not sometimes effect this without the Word; we are inclined to think he does; and that too by a kind of impression on the mind deterring us from evil and guiding us to good, [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24). [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). But he never does it contrary to the Word. Suffice it to say, that whether with or without the Word, he will guide us into all truth, so far as shall be necessary for the rectifying of our views, and the regulating of our conduct.

2. God will direct us by his **Providence**.

God often interposes for men in a most astonishing manner, to preserve them from evil, and to guide them into that which is good. Even a wicked Balaam was obstructed in his way by God's appointment, in order to awaken him to a just sense of his duty.

A remarkable instance of such an interposition occurs in the life of David. He, being incensed against Nabal for the contemptuous manner in which he had treated his messengers, and for his ungrateful refusal to administer to his necessities, [1 Samuel 25:4-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.4-11), had determined to avenge himself upon him and all that belonged to him. But God put it into the heart of Abigail to go to meet him, and by mild means to pacify his wrath, [1 Samuel 25:18-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.18-31). Thus were the greatest impieties prevented through the intervention of this prudent woman! [1 Samuel 25:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.32-34).

In the same way, God often directs the ways of his people, either sending a friend perhaps, or a minister, to suggest such considerations as shall influence their minds; or by some particular occurrence "raising, as it were, a hedge, or building a wall," to keep them in the path of duty, [Hosea 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.6-7). It may be that the occurrence may occasion much grief at the time; but God knows how to accomplish his own purposes, and will constrain us all in due time to acknowledge that "he does all things well!"

We will add a few words,

1. To direct your exertions.

Do not imagine that confidence in God is to supersede your own personal exertions. You are to labor, as much as if everything depended on yourselves; and then to trust in God, as if nothing had been done by you. You must also expressly commit your concerns to God in fervent and continual prayer. The Psalmist particularly combines this with confidence in God, "Trust in God at all times, pour out your hearts before him, [Psalm 62:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.8)." The confidence that is unaccompanied with prayer and diligence is mere sinful presumption. We have a beautiful pattern in Jacob, when he was about to meet his brother Esau. He disposed everything in a way most suited to pacify his brother's anger, or, in the event of not succeeding in that attempt, to secure that part of his family who were most dear to him; but, while he acted thus, he committed himself wholly to the Lord, and looked for success from him alone, [Genesis 32:9-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.9-32). Thus let there be no lack of prudence or of diligence on your part; and then you may be assured that God will not allow you to be disappointed of your hope.

2. To regulate your expectations.

Though God promises to direct your paths, he will not so direct you as to keep you from every degree of error. The apostles themselves, though in what they declared to be the will of God, they were inspired to utter nothing but what was true, were not infallible in their own personal conduct. Peter greatly erred on one occasion, in his conduct towards the Gentiles; as Paul also did in reviling God's high priest.

You must not therefore conceive that you are certainly and altogether right, because you have prayed to God for direction. God may have many wise and gracious purposes to answer by leaving you still under some measure of darkness and ignorance; if it is only to humble you still more, and to show you the blindness of your minds and the deceitfulness of your hearts; it is a good and gracious end, for which you will in the outcome see reason to be thankful. Be modest then, and diffident in your conclusions; and instead of assuming infallibility to yourselves, be always ready to suspect that your way is still far from perfect; and to the last hour of your lives be proving to God to lead you in a right path, and to fulfill to you that gracious promise, "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."

#758

THE REWARD OF CHARITY

**[Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10)**

"Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine!"

To instruct men how to ensure success in their agricultural pursuits or commercial speculations, is no part of a minister's office. Were we able substantially to benefit mankind in those particulars, there would be no lack of hearers, nor any complaint that we labored too zealously in our vocation. On the contrary, the more successful we were in effecting our wishes, the more gratefully would we be acknowledged as public benefactors.

Shall I then, for once, exceed, as it were, the commission given me, and attempt to teach you how to thrive in this world? Yes; allow me for once to usurp this office; and to assure the most unlearned person among you, that by acting on the principles which I will set before him this day, he shall be as sure to prosper in his business, as if he were ever so conversant with the arts of trade. I mean not indeed to say, that a person going out of his own proper line shall be enabled to prosecute that line to advantage; but that, while proceeding prudently in his proper vocation, he shall succeed more certainly, and to a greater extent, than on other principles he can expect to do.

I say this the more confidently, because the directions which I shall give are not the results of fallible reasonings or of uncertain conjectures, but the plain unequivocal declarations of God, "Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine!"

In these words we see,

I. Our duty.

We must "honor the Lord with our wealth".

All that we have is the Lord's! "Our very bodies and souls are his;" as well as the property which he has committed to our care. With the whole of that he is to be honored; and in the disposal of it, respect must be had to his will, his interests, his glory. We are to consider everything that we possess, not as given to us, but merely as confided to us, to be improved for him; and we must so employ the whole, as to meet his approbation in the day that we shall give up our account, and to be acknowledged by him as good and faithful stewards.

We must honor him, also, "with the first-fruits of all our increase."

The first-fruits under the Law were claimed by God as his, and they were to be presented to him as his peculiar property, "You shall take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which you shall bring, of the land which the Lord your God gives you, and shall put it in a basket, and shall go unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose to place his name there, [Deuteronomy 26:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.2)."

Besides these, was the tithe of all their increase to be offered to him every third year, "At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands, [Deuteronomy 14:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 14.28-29)."

Under the Gospel, the *letter* of this law is abolished; but the spirit of it yet remains in force; for the express command of God to us is, "On the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him, [1 Corinthians 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.2)." We are not to wait for the gathering in of our harvest; and then give a portion to the Lord after our own interests are secured; but rather to honor the Lord first, as the real proprietor of all; and then, trusting him for a supply of our own needs, to employ for ourselves what he shall graciously bestow upon us.

This duty will not appear hard, if we consider what God has spoken for,

II. Our encouragement.

It should seem as if the giving of our substance were the way to diminish it; and the devoting of our first-fruits to him, the way to endanger our own provision through the year. But God has declared the very reverse, and has pledged himself that he will amply make up to us all that we part with for his sake.

This, under the Law, he did, visibly, according to the letter.

Under that dispensation, a present and visible retribution marked, for the most part, the approbation or displeasure of God. When the people delayed to build his temple, he chastised them with famine, and referred to that visitation as a judgment inflicted on them for their sin, "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops, [Haggai 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 1.9-10)."

And when they were stirred up to begin the work, God not only assured them of his blessing on their temporal concerns, but bade them note down the day that the foundation of his temple was laid, and see whether their blessings were not augmented from that very hour, "From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought: Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. "'From this day on I will bless you.'" [Haggai 2:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.18-19)."

He bids them even to prove him in relation to this matter, and to see whether his bounty would not keep pace with their piety, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it! [Malachi 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.10)."

Under the Gospel, also, he will do it, but invisibly, and according to the spirit of our motto verse.

We are not taught to look so much to temporal rewards, as to those which are spiritual and eternal; though still we are told that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8);" and that, if we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all needful things shall be added unto us! [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33)."

Ee may not obtain a temporal recompense for our liberality; but a spiritual reward is sure. For thus said the Lord, "Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter--when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail, [Isaiah 58:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.7-11)."

An eternal recompense will also most assuredly await us; for our blessed Lord has expressly told us, that if instead of lavishing our money in self-indulgence and feasting ourselves, we delight to expend it on the poor, "we shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just, [Luke 14:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.12-14)." He has commanded us on this account to "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings! [Luke 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.9)."

And Paul speaks to the same effect when he says, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life! [1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19)."

But, after all, we must not altogether put out of our consideration even a present reward in the precise sense spoken of in our text; for it is beyond a doubt, that God does engage to supply the necessities of those who honor him with their substance, "I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever! [Philippians 4:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18-20)." We can appeal to many, and ask whether they have not seen, in relation to their temporal concerns, many gracious interpositions of God in their behalf?

But, independent of these, who does not know that liberality is the parent of economy, and economy of wealth? A man desirous of honoring God with his substance, is delivered at once from all those vices and follies which ruin the estates of thousands. Besides, who that delights in doing good has not found incomparably greater delight in self-denial for the benefit of others, than the utmost latitude of self-indulgence could ever have afforded him? Granting, then, that no addition is actually made to our wealth; yet, if our desires are moderated, and our selfish expenditures restrained—then the same effect is ultimately produced; for we are not more truly enriched by the increase of our substance, than we are by the diminution of our needs and our consumption.

Let me now point out the bearings of this subject,

1. On those who are engaged in visiting the sick.

[This section must be varied, according to the occasion. It was preached in behalf of a Visiting Society; but it may easily be accommodated to any other Charitable Institution.]

People engaged in imparting instruction to the ignorant, and consolation to the afflicted, have yet in a more eminent degree, the promise in our text fulfilled to them. Their light perhaps, at first, is but very imperfect; but by imparting it to others. their own views become enlarged, and their own experience of divine truth becomes deeper, from the very circumstance of their improving it for the benefit of others. Indeed, I can hardly suggest any better method for enlarging our own knowledge, than the making use of it for the instruction of our less enlightened brethren; for besides the natural effect which may be expected from the communication of knowledge, we may expect a peculiar blessing from God while we are so employed.

A remarkable instance of this may be found in Apollos, "He, when he knew only the baptism of John, spoke and taught diligently the Word of the Lord." "Aquila and Priscilla hearing him in the synagogue, took him, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." And then, going forth with his augmented light, he prospered far more in his labors of love, not only "convincing the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, but much helping those who had believed through grace, [Acts 18:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.24-28)." This example is most encouraging to all, to improve for God the light which they possess; for, whatever we do for God, is regarded by him as a loan which he will repay! [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17); and in every instance shall it be found, that "he who waters others, shall be watered also himself! [Proverbs 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.25)."

2. On those who contribute for the support of charity.

On these, the subject bears to its full extent; and we are warranted to affirm, that men shall "reap either sparingly or bountifully, according as they sow, [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6)." But there is one point of view in which they pre-eminently "honor God." and with peculiar advantage secure their reward. They honor God particularly, not merely by the distribution of their alms, but by employing and calling forth into activity the piety of others, for the benefit of their fellow-creatures.

It is obvious that individuals of small property could not, without assistance from others, relieve the necessities of the poor to any great extent; and if they could not administer some temporal relief, they could not find easy access to the chambers of the sick. But being furnished with the means of easy access, they can pour the light of instruction and the balm of consolation into the souls of the afflicted to great advantage; and the people so instructed and comforted, not only abound in thanksgivings to God for the benefits received, but in prayers to God in behalf of their benefactors.

This Paul speaks of, as ennobling charity far beyond the mere conveyance of temporal relief, "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people, but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else! [2 Corinthians 9:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.12-13)."

Now then, let me ask: How can you honor God more, than in causing thanksgivings to arise to him from the altars of many hearts? What compensation under Heaven can equal the prayers and intercessions of saints in your behalf? Put your alms in one scale, and the prayers offered to a prayer-hearing God in the other, and say whether your recompense is not very abundant, or whether it is possible to lay out money in any other way to such advantage? Let all of you, then, according to your power, "abound in this heavenly grace" of charity, after the example of your blessed Lord, "who, though he was rich—yet for your sakes became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)." Only get a sense of his love upon your souls, and a "sincere love to him" in return, and we shall have no occasion to entreat liberality from you. "For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving! [2 Corinthians 8:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.3-8)."

#759

THE PLEASANTNESS OF PIETY

**[Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17)**

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace!"

To be sincerely and eminently pious, is considered by the world as a symptom of weakness and folly. But the Scriptures represent such a life as characteristic of true wisdom. Upon such "wisdom" Solomon bestows the highest commendations, verses 13-16.

That this is the true meaning of "wisdom" and "understanding" is evident from [Job 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.28). He speaks of it as incomparably more precious than gold, or rubies, or any earthly good whatever; he paints wisdom as a queen disposing of riches, honor, and longevity to all her subjects. And because we are more captivated by the idea of pleasure than of anything else, he commends her to us in the text as productive of it in the highest possible degree.

We are naturally led to show from the words before us that,

I. Piety is pleasant **in its exercise**.

In confirmation of this truth, let us,

1. Consider piety in a general and comprehensive view.

True piety, as our Lord informs us, is comprehended in two things; the love of God, and the love of our neighbor.

Let us then inquire into the love of God.

Suppose a person filled with admiration of the divine perfections as exhibited in the works of creation—must not that be a pleasant exercise of mind?

Suppose him rising yet higher to the works of redemption, and contemplating the justice and the mercy, the truth and the love, the wisdom and the goodness of God—as united, and harmonizing, and glorified in the cross of Christ.

Suppose him, I say, contemplating these with rapture, until he bursts forth in songs of praise similar to those uttered by the angels at the birth of Christ, or those which are now sung around the throne of God—would there be no pleasure in such an employment?

Suppose him yet further meditating upon the mercies of God given to himself in particular, and adoring the triune God for all the wonders of electing, redeeming, sanctifying grace—must not such a frame be pleasant?

Inquire, next, into the love of our neighbor.

Suppose one to be exercising all those dispositions towards him which his relation to us or his situation demands.

Suppose one to be rejoicing with him in his prosperity, or to be weeping over his adversity in tender sympathy.

Suppose one to be stretching out the hand of charity for his relief, or administering consolation for his support.

Is there no pleasure in all this? Surely he has not the heart of a man, who can question this obvious, indubitable truth.

2. Consider piety in its most difficult and painful duties.

**Repentance**is a principal duty of true piety; but can we find, it may be asked, any pleasure in that? We answer, Yes, only view repentance in its proper light, and we will affirm that it is pleasant.

Suppose that one of us had by mistake swallowed somewhat that was poisonous; that we felt the deadly venom preying on our vitals; and that our physician informed us, that, unless removed from our stomach, the poison would destroy us in a few hours; would we deem the exertions necessary for the removal of it a painful task? Would we not gladly renew them, until we had accomplished our end? Would we not, instead of regretting the pain occasioned by them, feel thankful that we had an opportunity to use them? And would not the success that accompanied our efforts turn our pain into a pleasure?

Such then is repentance; it is a painful exertion to get rid of sin, which, if not expelled from our hearts, will utterly and eternally destroy us; and, though we do not say that pain can ever be pleasure—yet we affirm, that the very pangs of contrition, considered in a complex view, as consonant with our wishes and conducive to our good, are really pleasant. For the truth of our assertion we will appeal to all who ever experienced those pangs; we will ask whether the seasons of their deepest humiliation have not been the sweetest seasons of their lives? We fear no contradiction upon this point, unless from those who are wholly ignorant of the matter.

Self-denial is another, and a very important, duty. But this, it should seem, precludes, in the very nature of it, the idea of pleasure, because it is a thwarting of our own inclinations. We must however include this also among the ways that are ways of pleasantness.

That the gratifying of a corrupt inclination is pleasant to flesh and blood, we cannot deny; but that the mortifying of it is abundantly more pleasant, we do not hesitate to affirm.

Suppose a person tempted to yield to the solicitations of lust, or to gratify a no less keen appetite for revenge; would not a victory over his evil passions afford him more pleasure than a compliance with them? Would not the mortifying of an unchaste desire be attended with a pleasure more pure and refined than could be attained by the indulgence of it? And, granting that the overcoming of evil with evil would be pleasant, (for revenge, they say, is sweet,) would not the "overcoming it with good" afford him incomparably sublimer happiness! [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21).

Let us illustrate each of these positions by an example. Joseph, we know, resisted the importunity of his mistress; but were his sensations less pleasing when he had got out of the reach of temptation, than they would have been if he had consented to her wishes?

David, when enraged at the ingratitude and insolence of Nabal, went to avenge himself by his destruction; but when stopped and pacified by Abigail, did he regret the loss of any satisfaction which he would have felt in executing his cruel designs? No! he blessed her, and blessed God for her; and found infinitely more delight in the exercise of a forgiving spirit than the completest revenge could ever have afforded him, [1 Samuel 25:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.31-33). We maintain it then, that the self-denial which piety calls for, is a source of real pleasure to the soul.

The bearing of the cross is another duty inculcated on all the followers of Christ, [Luke 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.23). [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12). And can this be pleasant? Yes, we must affirm that this also is a source of pleasure to the true Christian. Doubtless the contempt and hatred which we must expect from an ungodly world are not pleasant in themselves; to be shut up in prison, and scourged, and put to a cruel and lingering death—are not pleasant in themselves; but, as endured for the sake of Christ, they are pleasant.

To ascertain this, inquire of those "who took joyfully the confiscation of their goods, [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34);" or those who, with their feet in the stocks and their backs torn with scourges "sang praises to God at midnight, [Acts 16:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.23-25)." Or those who, after their imprisonment, "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41)." Ask what our Lord meant, when he taught his followers to "rejoice and be exceedingly glad," whenever they should be called to suffer, [Matthew 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.11-12). And inquire of all the primitive saints who had learned. through grace, to "glory in tribulation, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3)." Inquire of him, who suffered more than any other of the Apostles, and who, speaking of his expected martyrdom, exults in it as a matter of the warmest encouragement, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18).

The experience of all true Christians is the same at this day; they "count themselves happy when they are called to endure suffering, [James 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2); [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11);" and look upon it as a special honor conferred upon them, when "it is given them to suffer anything for their Redeemer's sake, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29)." In a word, piety raises us so much above earthly pains and pleasures, as to render us altogether independent on them for our happiness, [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18).

Seeing then that even the most painful duties of piety are sources of pleasure, we may confidently affirm the same respecting "all" her ways.

To this blessed account of wisdom's ways, we may add,

II. Piety is pleasant in its **peaceful outcome**.

Mark the influences of piety on all who walk in her ways:

1. Piety is pleasant **in life**.

None know anything of "peace," except the true Christian. As God has said, so experience proves, that "there is no peace to the wicked, [Isaiah 57:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.21)." The cisterns to which they go for refreshment, are polluted; or rather, they are "broken cisterns that can hold no water, [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13)." All that they possess is more "vanity and vexation of spirit." "Even in laughter their heart is sorrowful; and the end of their mirth is heaviness, [Ecclesiastes 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.2). [Proverbs 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.13)."

But is it thus with the true Christian? Has he peace in his soul, and joys with which the stranger does not understand? Yes, he "has already entered into rest, [Hebrews 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.3)."

He has a tranquility arising from the subjugation of his passions.

He has a holy composure of mind springing from the testimony of a good conscience, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12).

He has many sweet manifestations of God's love to his soul.

He has that within him which mitigates every sorrow, enhances every enjoyment, and supplies his every need.

In a word, from committing his soul, and all his concerns, to God, he has "a peace that passes all understanding." This peace, we say, flows from the very exercises of piety, and is, more or less, an inseparable attendant on them.

To this effect the inspired writers uniformly speak. The Psalmist observes, "Great peace have they that love your law, [Psalm 119:165](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.165)." To the same purpose Isaiah also says, "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)." Paul confirms their testimony, saying, "To be carnally-minded is death; but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace! [Romans 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.6)."

2. Piety is pleasant **in death**.

Even in the time of health the ungodly cannot bear to think of death; conversation upon that solemn subject is irksome and disgusting to them; they avoid it, because it makes them melancholy. If they are attacked with any fatal disease, their friends do all that they can to abate their fears, and to hide from them the real state of their disorder. When at last they come to feel their danger, then they are full of alarm and terror; and, however much they despised the duties of piety before, they will then begin to pay attention to them.

There are some indeed so blinded by their own delusions, that they believe themselves safe; while others are so callous as to be altogether insensible of their awful condition. But if men are not wholly blinded by conceit, or hardened by wickedness, they cannot but tremble at the approach of death; and then the hopes which they once fondly entertained, give way to painful forebodings, even to "a fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation."

On the contrary, he who has walked in wisdom's ways, is enabled in the midst of life to look forward to death, (like a bridegroom to his approaching nuptials,) as to the period, when all his desires shall be fulfilled, and his joys consummated. As he beholds death approaching, he rather chides its tardiness, than deprecates its advent. He "knows in whom he has believed;" and, in the hour of his departure, commits his soul with confidence into the hands of his ever-living and adorable Redeemer!

Thus Stephen, [Acts 7:59-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.59-60); thus Paul, [2 Timothy 4:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.6-8); and innumerable others, have died; and David tells us, that it is the privilege of all true believers to expect and enjoy such a death as this, "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)."

3. Piety is pleasant **in eternity**.

As soon as the ungodly enter into the eternal world, whether they were conceited or callous, whether confident or trembling, they know the truth of all that God's Word has declared.

The Rich Man that fared sumptuously no sooner breathed out his soul, than he understood and felt the evil of neglecting his eternal interests; he then found his misery irremediable, and incapable of the smallest alleviation. He knew that his five surviving brethren were living in the same thoughtless way, and hastening to the same fatal end; and wished that they might be apprised of their danger, before it were too late. He knew by bitter experience that to those who lived and died in sin, nothing remained but unintermitted everlasting misery! "They drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11)."

How different is the state of true Christians! They enjoy "the rest which here remained for them;" they rest in the bosom of their Savior, free from all sin and temptation, from pain and weariness. The peace which they enjoyed in this world, was but a taste of that banquet on which they feast continually, a drop of "those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore!"

ADDRESS.

1. The votaries of pleasure.

There are two fatal mistakes under which you labor:

1. The one is, that you think piety according to the Scriptural representation of it, will afford nothing but pain.

2. The other is, that piety will consist with an enjoyment of all the pleasures of the world.

With respect to the former of these, we hope that nothing need be added to what has been already spoken; we hope that piety, if it has a dark and gloomy side, has also, like the pillar and cloud, a bright and cheering aspect; it is only on God's enemies that it casts a gloom; to his friends it affords a reviving light, a refreshing shade, a sure and safe directory to Heaven.

With respect to the latter idea, namely, that of piety countenancing worldly pleasures; surely no one can deliberately put such a construction on our text. If so, what can be meant by Paul, when he says, "She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives, [1 Timothy 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.6)." What could John mean, when he said, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, [1 John 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.15-16)." And what could our Lord mean, when he said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world, [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16)."

Do not be deceived, as though carnal and worldly pleasures were the only sources of enjoyment. But be assured that the renunciation of them will contribute more to your happiness than the indulgence; and that real pleasure is to be found in God alone!

2. The disciples of Christ.

The wicked know that you profess to find more pleasure in piety than they can obtain in the world; give them not then any reason to think that you are disappointed in your expectations.

If they see you lukewarm in piety, will they not conclude that it has not charms sufficient to allure you, or benefits sufficient to reward your labor?

If they see you joining in their company and vain pursuits, will they not, however they may encourage you in such a conduct, suppose that piety is not able to make you happy, and that you are forced, after all your professions, to come and borrow of their carnal pleasures, in order to eke out the scanty pittance that piety has bestowed?

O bring not such disgrace upon your holy profession. Show that you despise the vanities of this world, and that you have no appetite for husks after living upon "the bread that is in your Father's house!" Our Lord has said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Show therefore that you feel it so; and let it be seen by your zeal in religious duties, that they are not a weariness to you, but a delight. Thus will you recommend to others the paths you tread, and prove to them that "your feet are guided into the way of peace."

#760

TRUE RELIGION DELINEATED

**[Proverbs 3:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.21-24)**

"My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet!"

In the book of Proverbs, "wisdom" is generally put for true religion. But in some places, perhaps, it may be interpreted as representing Christ himself, who is "the wisdom of God and the power of God." But in our text there can be no doubt of its importing piety, or the influence of true religion in the soul. And though in the Book of Proverbs the doctrines of religion are not very distinctly specified, the general character of it is developed with peculiar richness and beauty; and this gives to the Proverbs of Solomon, an importance far beyond what would belong to a mere collection of moral lessons.

We have, in the passage before us, what I might almost call a full-length picture of true religion, both in its character and effects; and in these two points of view, we shall, in conformity with our text:

I. Consider true religion in its true and proper character.

Doubtless religion admits of an infinite diversity of description. But in no place can we find a juster representation of it than in that before us.

1. True religion is **wisdom in the heart**.

Were we to define "wisdom," we would say: It is the seeking of the best ends by the fittest means.

And were we to declare what "true religion" is, we would say: It is the seeking of the salvation of the soul through the mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ.

Now, then, I would ask: What end is there for us to propose to ourselves, that can be compared with the everlasting salvation of our souls? The pursuit of crowns and kingdoms would be unworthy of an effort, in comparison with this; Truly it is "the one thing needful."

Again I would ask: What means are there fitted for the attainment of this end in comparison with those which are proposed to us in the gospel of Christ? There we find a Savior precisely suited to our necessities:

One who has made an atonement for all our sins.

One who "ever lives to make intercession for us" in Heaven.

One who, us the Head of all vital influence, is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." By the exercise of genuine faith in him, we become partakers of all his blessings; and, therefore, it is our one aim from day to day to "live by faith upon him," and to "receive out of his fullness" all the blessings which we stand in need of!

Now, compare with this any other mode of salvation that can be devised; and its wisdom will shine forth as the sun, which eclipses, and, as it were, blots from the firmament, all the lights of Heaven.

2. True religion is **discretion in the life**.

When once true religion occupies the soul, it implants a spiritual principle there which thenceforth regulates the whole man.

No longer does an anxiety about earthly things distract the mind.

Pleasure, riches, and honor—are all subordinated to the welfare of the soul.

The will of God in his Word, becomes the one only rule of conduct to him.

A regard for God's honor will then operate, so as to give to all circumstances, whether of time or place, their legitimate influence, and to secure to him who is under its influence the approbation of the wise and good. He illustrates in his life that saying of Solomon, "I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence."

In a word, to approve himself to God is the one object of his life; and that one object being ever before his eyes, he is kept from every corrupt bias, and from the inconsistencies which an unhallowed principle would produce.

Of course, it must not be supposed that a person, naturally weak and foolish, will pass in a moment to a comprehensiveness of mind and soundness of judgment. That is not to be expected; on the contrary, inasmuch as a principle of piety infinitely outweighs every earthly object, it may be expected, that, on its first entrance into the soul, it will operate rather in a way of extravagance, and cause a person to overlook the minor considerations of prudence and discretion. But this must be imputed not to religion itself, but to the weakness of him in whom it dwells; and the effect of religion will be to correct his errors, and to induce habits of wisdom, which no other principle would ever have been able to form within him.

II. Consider true religion in its just and necessary effects.

Religion is not a mere principle; nor does it consist in any peculiar practice without a principle; it is an operative principle:

1. True religion produces **spiritual life in the soul**.

I cannot give any more just view of religion, than by saying, It is that in the soul, which the soul is in the body. Without the soul, the body is dead; and without religion, the soul is dead. By the soul the body is animated, and performs all the functions of the animal life; by religion the soul is quickened, and performs all the functions of the spiritual life. By the union of the soul with the body, all the powers, both of body and mind, are called into activity. And by the operation of religion in the soul—the understanding, the will, the affections, the memory, the conscience, perform their respective offices in subserviency to God, for the promotion of a man's spiritual and eternal good.

The soul, pervading the whole body, acts with ease and regularity, and with so little ostentation, that its operations, though effectual, attract no notice.

And so it is with true religion in the soul; it brings into easy and harmonious use all its different faculties and powers, governing the whole man, and subjecting even the thoughts themselves to the obedience of Christ.

In a word, it is, as my text has said, "life to the soul." If we were to understand by this expression, that it tends to lengthen out the existence of man on earth, it would be true, and an important truth; but we cannot so contract the sense, or comprehend less in these words than what we have expressed. True religion makes a man a new creature, "old things pass away, and all things become new."

2. True religion produces **gracefulness in the deportment**.

Well is it said by the Apostle, that "a meek and quiet spirit is, in the sight of God himself, an ornament of great price." Through the operation of divine grace upon the soul, all the tempers and dispositions will be kept in order; so that none shall prevail to the injury of other men, or to the dishonor of the man himself. The discipline of religion is somewhat like that which prevails in reference to the body among the higher ranks of society. In people untaught, there is an awkwardness, as it were, apparent in their whole gait; while those who have mixed in polished society have a comparative ease and elegance in all their motions.

So, if you see a person uninstructed in religion engaged in religious exercises, he is not at home in any of them; his occupation sits not easy upon him; and if he attempt to assume the posture of real piety, he betrays his lack of true feeling by the very motions in which he attempts to express it.

But let a contrite and devout soul draw near to God, and there is a correspondence between his looks and attitude, his words and professions. His every motion is such as befits the employment in which he is engaged. Yes, there is a symmetry in every part of the spiritual man, so that his whole demeanor is simple, uniform, befitting. He exemplifies in his life that expression of the Psalmist, "I will beautify the meek with salvation;" and he shows in his deportment what that inspired writer meant by that petition, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." The more of real piety any man possesses, the more of this image will be stamped upon him; and the more he communes with his God, the more will a divine glory surround his head, and beam forth from his countenance in the sight of all who behold him.

3. True religion produces **stability in the walk**.

The man of sound wisdom takes heed to his ways; he desires to see his path clear before him. If he is in doubt, he will take "the Word of God as a light to his feet, and a lantern to his paths." If his path is slippery, he will cry unto his God, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps do not slip!" And in answer to his prayer, "God will give his angels charge over him, to keep him in all his ways, that he dash not his foot against a stone."

Of these advantages the unconverted man has no experience. He ventures into scenes of temptation, without being aware of his danger; nor has he any guidance or strength but his own. What wonder, then, if he falls?

But the man who, with wisdom in his heart, and discretion in his life, "suffers not these" guardian angels, as it were, "to depart from his eyes," will be kept amidst all the most trying scenes in which he can be engaged, and "will be preserved blameless unto the kingdom of his God." "The Law of God is in his heart, and therefore his footsteps do not slide. See [Psalm 37:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.31) and [Proverbs 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.11-13)."

4. True religion produces **peace in the heart**.

"What man is he who fears the Lord? His soul," says the Psalmist, "shall dwell at ease." A man without religion may pass through the day with some degree of comfort, because of the variety of occupations that engage his thoughts. But when he comes to lie down at night, and he has time for reflection, some painful occurrence will dwell upon his mind, and agitate his spirits, and disturb his rest. And when he wakes in the morning, the same unpleasant feelings will haunt him, and destroy that serenity which sleep was calculated to convey. Or, if nothing particular has occurred to distress him, he lies down and rises up without any other feeling than that which he possesses in common with the beasts.

But not so the truly pious man. He, when retiring to rest, calls to remembrance the mercies with which he has been encompassed during the day, and renders thanks for them to his heavenly Benefactor; to whom also he commends himself for protection during the defenseless hours of the night.

Shall I speak too strongly if I say that he lies down, as it were, in the bosom of his God, saying, "I will lay down in peace, and sleep; for you Lord, make me to dwell in safety?" In the morning, too, when he awakes, he finds that "his sleep has been sweet unto him;" not to his body merely, but to his soul; for his soul, at the first resuming of its powers, finds God present with it, in a way which the merely natural man has no conception of; so true is that expression of the Psalmist, "When I awake, I am still with you." So true, also, is that encouraging promise of Solomon, "Bind the commandment upon your heart, and tie it about your neck; when you go, it shall lead you; when you sleep, it shall keep you; and when you awake, it shall walk with you."

APPLICATION.

1. Are there now any present, who are prejudiced against religion?

Know what true religion is. It is not by any means that thing which worldly people are ready to imagine. "It is wisdom, sound wisdom, and discretion." There are surely in the Gospel many things which surpass our comprehension. But so there are also in all the other works of God, whether of creation or providence. But if there are truths at which a proud man will stumble, there is not one which will not commend itself to a humble and childlike spirit. And as far as piety operates upon the soul, it induces discretion in every part of a man's conduct, and assimilates him to the very image of his God.

Who among us will say that the Savior's example was not good? Yet his enemies condemned it, and accounted him worthy to be crucified as the vilest malefactor! And may there not be a measure of the same prejudice in you—a prejudice that blinds your eyes, and makes you to hate those whom you should love and honor?

At all events, know this; whatever corresponds not with religion as described in our text, we disclaim. If there is folly and indiscretion in any who profess the Gospel, let them bear the blame, and not religion. But if you will condemn the care of the soul as a needless preciseness, and a cleaving unto the Savior as an enthusiastic and vain conceit—then you shall bear the burden; for, blame these things as you may, know that "Wisdom will be justified by all her children."

2. Are there those here who profess to love piety?

Beware, lest by anything imprudent you "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of;" yes, seek rather to the utmost of your power to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." On your conduct much depends. Men will not judge of religion so much by what we *say*, as by what we *do*. In vain shall Solomon himself describe it as forming such lovely characters, if you contradict his statements in your life and conversation. However we may expose the folly of so doing, men will identify religion with the conduct of its professors; and will take occasion, from anything that is unfitting in you, to cast reflections upon religion for your sake.

But knowing this propensity in them, you should be doubly careful not to cast a stumbling-block in their way. See to it, then, that you "walk worthy of your high calling." If you are children of the light, let it be seen by the holiness of your conduct; and, wherever you go, be epistles of Christ, known and read by all men; so that all who behold you may be constrained to say, "We will go with you; for we see that God is with you in truth!"

#761

THE REWARDS OF WISDOM AND OF FOLLY

**[Proverbs 3:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.35)**

"The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools!"

A desire for distinction, and a fear of shame, are powerful incentives to the human mind. They produce, in every department of life, exertions far beyond those to which mere natural inclination would prompt us. The soldier on the field of battle finds those principles stronger than the fear of death!

Now, these feelings being founded in nature itself, God is pleased to call them into action in reference to things of far higher consequence than those which too generally engross them.

Disgrace or honor are awarded to men, even in the present life, on moral and religious grounds, and much more will they in the life to come; and I wish that a due concern may be felt in reference to them, while I point out:

I. The influence of wisdom on **our present state**.

Wisdom may fitly be described as a conformity to the mind of God; and folly may fitly be described as any aberration from wisdom. But it is the Gospel alone that places these in their true light.

1. Let us distinguish the two characters.

The Gospel is a proclamation of mercy to perishing sinners, through the death and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; nor is there any way of salvation for fallen man, except that which is there revealed. All who are not savingly interested in that Savior must perish under the guilt of their sins.

Now, who is wise, but he who labors to secure that salvation? Or who is a fool, but he who neglects it? Suppose that means of escape from a sinking vessel, or a house in flames, were offered to one in danger of instantaneous destruction; would any person in the universe hesitate to assign the proper and distinctive epithets to him who availed himself of them, and to him who disregarded them? Yet would their conduct but very faintly shadow forth that which is exhibited under the Gospel dispensation; and the terms used to designate that conduct would very faintly describe its appropriate character.

Let the two characters, then, be properly distinguished. Where is the man who, with all humility of mind and entire devotion of soul, seeks a saving interest in the Savior? Him we may safely designate as "wise."

Where, on the other hand, is the man who neglects the Savior? Whatever excuses he may allege in vindication of his conduct, we need not hesitate to assign to him the humiliating appellation of a "fool."

2. Let us declare their proper recompense.

"The wise" shall even here "inherit glory." Everyone, whatever his own practice may be, has within his own bosom a witness in favor of those who are religious, provided their conduct is uniform and consistent. In outward profession, I grant, the world may brand religion with the name of folly; but their consciences in secret give a very different testimony; nor is there any man, however ungodly, so wicked, but that he reverences in his heart a pious character, and wishes, if it were possible, to be found in his place at the day of judgment!

Herod, in the midst of all his impiety, "feared John, because he knew him to be a just and holy man." And so it is with the ungodly world; they venerate the very man whom for his piety they hate and persecute.

On the other hand, vain and thoughtless as are the world at large, and interested in upholding each other in their various pursuits, there is not one among them, who, in his moments of reflection, does not see the emptiness and vanity of worldly things; and who would not regard it as an inconsistency in a religious man, if he should betray an eagerness in the prosecution of them. The truth of these observations will be manifest beyond either contradiction or doubt, if only we bear in mind the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees of old, who, while persecuting our blessed Lord even unto death, "built the tombs of the prophets, and garnished the sepulchers of the righteous," whom their forefathers had put to death! [Matthew 23:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.29-31).

Precisely thus we also at this time honor the memory of the Apostles, and of our own reformers too, for who does not honor the names of Cranmer, and Latimer, and Ridley—while we hate, revile, and persecute the living saints, who walk in their steps; and the names of the Scribes and Pharisees of old are odious to us, while we pay respect to those who sustain the same character among ourselves! All this clearly shows that whatever our outward behavior may be towards the two different parties, both of them have an inward witness in our own bosoms, "the wise inheriting the glory" that is due to them, while "shame is the only recompense of fools."

But still more effect will wisdom have,

II. The influence of wisdom on our condition **in the eternal world**.

There the conduct of all will be rightly appreciated.

In this present world there are many things which obscure the wisdom of the wise, and which serve to palliate the folly of fools. The weaknesses of many good men excite a prejudice against their opinions and conduct, and do really cast an air of folly over their very profession. This is deeply to be lamented; but, while there is so much folly bound up in the heart of man, and in many the seed of Divine Grace is but as a grain of mustard-seed, it is not to be wondered at that such stumbling-blocks should occur; indeed, unless a miracle were wrought to turn babes at once into young men and fathers, it is scarcely possible that offences of some kind should not arise from the injudicious deportment of weaker brethren.

On the other hand, among those who are not devoted to the Savior, there are many eminent for their attainments in science, and abounding in every species of worldly wisdom; and amidst so much that is amiable and good, it is difficult to mark with befitting severity the folly of which they are guilty.

But God will judge righteous judgment; he will distinguish infallibly between the errors of the judgment and the bias of the heart; and to those who sought him, though in much weakness, he will give a testimony of acceptance. But on those who sought him not he will denounce his sentence of eternal condemnation!

Then will wisdom and folly appear in their true light.

Behold the saint approved of his God, and seated on a throne of glory! Will anyone think he sacrificed too much for this, or labored too hard for this? Will there be any difference of opinion respecting him, among the hosts of Heaven, or even in the regions of Hell? No! There will be but one testimony respecting him. Every creature in the universe will pronounce him wise.

See, on the other hand, the most successful and distinguished of the human race banished from the presence of that Savior whom he would not seek, and of that God whom he refused to serve! Will there be any difference of opinion respecting his folly? Nay, will not he himself be the very first to accuse himself, and to curse the folly which once he so fondly cherished? Yes! We are told that, in Hell, men will "weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth" with anguish; and I cannot doubt but that their self-reproach will be one of the bitterest ingredients in the cup which will there be given them to drink. When they see in what their love of "promotion" has issued, and that it has brought nothing but a pre-eminence in "shame" and sorrow—they will set their seal to that once-despised truth, that "wisdom excels folly, as much as light excels darkness!"

Permit me now to recommend to every one among you:

A retrospect of your **past lives**.

What is your estimate now of your past life? If there one among you who would not rather that it should have been under the influence of wisdom, than that it should have been so devoted to folly, as in the great majority of cases it has been? I suppose there is scarcely anyone that has not, at some season or other, had moments of reflection, and formed some faint purposes of amendment. Let the humiliation then experienced have been ever so transient, do you not at this time look back upon it as the best hour of your lives? And do you not regret that it so speedily passed away? And, however deeply you may have drunk of the cup of pleasure, do you not now feel that it is all vanity, and that nothing of it remains but the dregs, which have a bitter taste? Where is there one among you, who, if he should hear it dying man glorying in having lived altogether to the flesh and to the world, would not be shocked at it as an excess of impiety and folly? Or who, if he were himself in dying circumstances, would not wish for a far different frame of mind to prepare him for his great account?

I make this appeal with confidence, and am content to rest the whole of what I have said on the testimony of your own consciences. Yes, beloved brethren, you shall be constituted judges in your own case; and I will abide by the decision which you yourselves shall give. Let your convictions, then, be now realized; and let the Lord Jesus Christ be now sought by you without delay.

2. A prospective view of **futurity**.

Soon you will be convinced, at all events, whether you will listen to good instruction now, or not. Soon you will see whose word shall stand—the world's, or God's! Depend upon it, God's Word will not change. What he has designated as wisdom by the mouth of Prophets and Apostles, he will pronounce to have been so, when he shall sit on his throne of judgment.

Why will you not then anticipate that sentence? And why will you not consider what your reflections will be, when all your present opportunities of turning unto God shall have passed away?

This only do I ask of you, "Act now, as you will then wish you had acted!" Methinks this is a reasonable request; it is a request which every one acknowledges to be good in reference to the things of time; and surely it cannot be less good in reference to eternity! May God enable all of you, then, to comply with it! And may you all not only become wise, but be made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus!

#762

THE NATURE AND EXCELLENCE OF TRUE WISDOM

**[Proverbs 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.7)**

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom!  
 Though it costs all you have, get understanding!"

The inspired volume is no less useful in rectifying the prejudices of education, than it is in restraining the indulgence of forbidden desires. As far as relates to the grosser violations of moral duty, the advice of parents and teachers is in unison with the Holy Scriptures; but we are very rarely exhorted to follow that which is the main end and purpose of life. Get wealth! Get honor! are the lessons inculcated on all the rising generation. David however sets us a better example; he earnestly entreated his son above all things to cultivate true religion. And Solomon, having reaped much advantage from those instructions, has left them on record for our benefit in verses 3-7. We shall endeavor to show:

I. The **nature** and **excellence** of true wisdom.

That which is usually termed wisdom is far from being the object so extolled in the text.

We do not mean to depreciate the attainments of art or science. They are valuable in themselves, and, if duly improved, may, like the Egyptian gold, enrich and beautify the sanctuary of God. But the wisdom spoken of in the text, has respect entirely to spiritual things.

True wisdom is the proposing of the best ends and prosecuting of them by the fittest means.

There is no end so worthy to be pursued by a rational creature, as the sanctification and salvation of his own soul. Nor are there any means of attaining it so proper, as those prescribed in the holy Scriptures. To repent of all our sins, to flee to Christ for the pardon of them, and to seek the renovation of our hearts by the Holy Spirit, are represented as the only effectual means of salvation.

These things, it must be confessed, are often called folly; but they are called so only by those, who have never known them by experience. Not one among the holy angels would account it folly to love and serve God. None of the redeemed in Heaven regret that they were once so strenuous in the exercises of true religion. The saints on earth are precisely of the same mind with those in Heaven. Hence conversion to a holy life is called "a turning of the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, [Luke 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.17)." Even devils and damned spirits would confess that devotedness of heart to God is the truest wisdom. Careless sinners are the only beings who dissent from this truth; and they in a little time will assuredly alter their opinion! What do those rich men, [Luke 12:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.19-20); [Luke 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.19); [Luke 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.23), now think of their once envied state?

Such wisdom is justly termed "the principal thing."

There are many other things which are important in their place; but this is far superior to them all. Riches cannot be put in competition with wisdom, [Job 28:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.12-19). Pleasure, honor, or even life itself, are not worthy to be compared with wisdom, [Proverbs 3:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.13-18). Wisdom excels everything else as much as light excels darkness, [Ecclesiastes 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.13). This exclusively deserves the name of wisdom, God himself being witness, [Job 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.28). It is "the good part, [Luke 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.42)," and he alone can be called truly wise, who, like Paul, accounts everything but loss for that unspeakably excellent attainment, [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8).

Its excellency being thus established, we may proceed,

II. To urge upon you the **diligent pursuit** of wisdom.

In the text, with the preceding context, we may see the utmost fervor that language can express. May we be animated with the same, while we labor to impress the subject on your minds by the following considerations! Consider then:

1. This wisdom is both more **easily**, and more **certainly**, to be attained than anything else.

With respect to other things, every one has not a capacity for making great attainments; nor have all, who possess good abilities, an opportunity of cultivating them to advantage. Nor can great industry united with great talents, always ensure success, [Ecclesiastes 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.11); but no man ever sought wisdom in vain. The poor fishermen of Galilee were as capable of comprehending it, as the philosophers of Greece and Rome. We attain wisdom, not by the mere exertion of our own powers, but by the teachings of God's Spirit, [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13); [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45). Nor will he ever refuse that heavenly gift to any who seek it with a teachable and childlike disposition, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5). This thought may well encourage all. May we be stirred up by it to seek the unction that shall teach us all things, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20). Then will God bestow upon us his promised blessing, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6); and make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ, [2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15).

2. There is nothing else which will so **conduce to our present happiness** as godly wisdom.

The creature is justly represented as a cistern that will hold no water, [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13). All who seek happiness in it are disappointed. Even science itself, which is the most rational of all earthly pleasures, is often a source of sorrow and vexation, [Ecclesiastes 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 1.17-18).

But true wisdom is an overflowing fountain of joy. In prosperity, wisdom adds a zest to all our comforts; and in adversity, a balm to all our sorrows. In a time of pain and trouble, more especially its excellency appears. What can earthly things do to assuage our anguish or compose our minds, [Ecclesiastes 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.17). But piety enables us to see the rod in our Father's hand, and to know that He is working all for our good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). Paul found wisdom to be wealth in poverty, joy in sorrow, life in death! [2 Corinthians 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.9-10). And such will every Christian experience wisdom to be in the hour of trial, [Proverbs 3:21-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.21-26). Shall not this consideration then quicken our diligence in the pursuit of wisdom?

3. There is nothing besides wisdom that can in the least promote our eternal welfare.

Our duties, when performed with an eye to God, are a part of religion itself; but, independent of the respect which we have to him in the performance of them, they are of no value in his sight. A person may do many things that are beneficial to society, and yet be dead in trespasses and sins. But Solomon, specifying the supreme excellency of wisdom, affirms, that it gives life to them that have it, [Ecclesiastes 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.12). No man can perish that possesses godly wisdom; nor can any man be saved who is destitute of it, [Romans 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.6); [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13). Shall we not then be prevailed upon to seek wisdom? Shall we disregard the commendations that David and Solomon have given of it? And shall their importunity be treated by us with coldness and neglect? Surely such a conduct may well expose us to the most severe of all reflections, [Proverbs 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 17.16).

"Allow then a word of exhortation."

The wisdom here spoken of is not the only thing in the world that is desirable; nor the only thing that you may laudably pursue. There are innumerable other things which demand our attention; and which our several conditions in life render necessary. The text itself supposes, or rather enjoins, that we should labor to get other things; but wisdom is indisputably "the principal thing;" and "with all our getting we must be mindful to get understanding."

Whatever else is neglected, wisdom must not. Wisdom is "the one thing needful." Therefore, "get it, get it, get it, get it! Four times is this repeated in verses 5, 7." "Forsake it not, neither forget it; exalt it, love it, and embrace it; so shall it be an ornament of grace to your head, and a crown of glory to your soul." For whoever finds wisdom finds life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord, [Proverbs 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.35).

#763

THE CHRISTIAN'S PATH COMPARED TO THE LIGHT

**[Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18)**

"The path of the righteous is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day!"

Habits, of whatever kind, are strengthened by exercise; the more congenial they are with our natural feelings, the more easily are they confirmed.

Hence the wicked, without any express purpose on their part, are daily more and more riveted to the world and sin.

The righteous too, increase in love to the ways of God in proportion as they endeavor to fulfill his will. They have indeed a bias, which, if they were left to themselves, would soon turn them aside. But God will not leave them destitute of needful support; he pledges himself that their path shall resemble the shining light. This is found true by happy experience.

I. The path of the righteous is **beautiful in its appearance**.

The rising sun is as beautiful an object as any in the whole creation.

At its first approach it tinges the distant clouds with light. On its first appearance it gilds the summits of the woods and mountains; then, dispelling all the shadows of night, it illumines the whole horizon. How delightful is this to every one that beholds it, [Ecclesiastes 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.7).

In the same way, the path of the righteous is exceeding beautiful.

"The righteous" are those who are renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God. Their path in the very outset is beautiful to behold. Their simplicity of mind, and teachableness of spirit, endear them to us; their lowliness and humility attract the notice of the very angels themselves, [Luke 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.10). The fervor of their love engages both our admiration and esteem. The very shadows in their character serve as a contrast to show the excellence of the change that has passed upon them. As they proceed their graces are more matured. Their course is justly described by the Apostle Paul in [Philippians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.8). Surely such a conduct must be beautiful in the eyes of God and man. They are justly spoken of as "beautified with salvation, [Psalm 149:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.4); they even reflect a luster upon the Gospel itself, [Titus 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.10).

While their path is so amiable, it resembles the light further, in that,

II. The path of the righteous is **beneficial in its influence**.

The sun does not shine with unproductive splendor.

It enables the several orders of men to return to their respective callings. In the darkness they could not go without stumbling, [John 11:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.9-10); but now they follow their occupations without fear or difficulty. The productions of the earth also feel the genial influence of the sun, and are matured by means of its invigorating beams.

In the same way, the Christian is profitable in his course.

The wicked are stumbling on every side of him [Proverbs 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.19); but the Christian affords a light to the benighted souls around him, [Matthew 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.14). He shines in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16); he is an epistle of Christ, known and read by all men, [2 Corinthians 3:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.2-3). The account given of Job, describes his course, as far as his situation and circumstances will allow, [Job 29:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.11-16). Thus by his conduct he puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men, [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.15). He even wins some, perhaps, whom the Word alone would never have converted, [1 Peter 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1-2), and causes many to glorify his heavenly Father, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16).

The comparison yet further holds, in that,

III. The path of the righteous is **constant in its progress**.

The sun invariably pursues its usual course.

From the instant it rises, it hastens toward the meridian. Sometimes indeed its splendor is intercepted by clouds, and sometimes it may be partially, or even totally eclipsed; still, however, it proceeds in its appointed path, and is sure to arrive at its meridian height.

The Christian too, goes forward towards perfection.

He never rests as though he had attained the summit, [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12). He determines to be ever pressing forward for higher attainments, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14). He may indeed for a season be involved in clouds; yes, perhaps, he may through the violence of temptation, suffer an eclipse; but, if he is really "just" and upright, his light shall break forth again. God has ensured this by a solemn promise, [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9). Jeremiah illustrates it by the very allusion in the text, [Jeremiah 31:33-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.33-37); nor is this progress the privilege of some only, [Philippians 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6-7). David speaks of it as belonging to Israel of old, [Psalm 84:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.7). Paul represents it as enjoyed by every true Christian, 2 Corinthians 3:18; and Peter shows us whence this stability proceeds, 1 Peter 1:5. None indeed arrive at absolute perfection in this life, 1 Corinthians 13:9-10; but soon the just will be changed into Christ's perfect image! [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2). [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21), and shine above the sun in the firmament forever and ever, [Daniel 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.3) and [Matthew 13:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.43).

Improvement.

1. For conviction.

We are in a world that lies in darkness and the shadow of death; and, if we are Christians indeed, we are shining as lights in a dark place. Do our consciences testify that this is the case with us? Are we examples of holiness to those of our own age and rank? Do we reprove all works of darkness, instead of having fellowship with them? [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11). If not, how can we ever be numbered among the just? Shall we say that we once were such, but are now under a cloud? Or that our light is at the present eclipsed! Let us beware lest we prove only as a fleeting meteor. Our light must be steady and increasing, like that of the sun. The tree is known by its fruit; and the just by their light, [Ephesians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.8); and a false profession will deceive us to our eternal ruin! [1 John 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.6); [1 John 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.9); [1 John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.11).

2. For consolation.

There are many true Christians who do not enjoy much comfort, and the darkness of their minds sometimes makes them doubt whether they are upright before God; but they often write bitter things against themselves without a cause. Distress, whether temporal or spiritual, argues nothing against our integrity. Job never shone brighter than in his trouble; nor Christ, than in the depths of his passion. Let him then that is in darkness, stay himself upon his God, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10). It is to such people that God sends us with words of comfort, [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4). To them in particular is that delightful declaration addressed, [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10). Wait then the Lord's timing, you afflicted souls, and trust in him. Soon shall your "light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day;" nor will God be glorified less in your patience, than in more active services.

#764

KEEPING THE HEART

**[Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.23)**

"Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life!"

It is certainly of infinite importance that we be deeply convinced of our utter inability to do anything that is good in God's sight, and of our entire dependence upon God for the effectual aids of his Holy Spirit. But we must not imagine, that, because we have no sufficiency of ourselves to do the will of God, we are not bound in duty to do it, or not to be exhorted and stimulated to the performance of it. Our duty is the same, whatever are the circumstances to which we have reduced ourselves; and it is in, and by, our personal exertions, that God has promised to "work all our works in us." Hence, in the Scriptures of Truth, we are continually exhorted to serve our God in the way of his commandments. It is obvious that we cannot preserve the life of our bodies for one single moment; yet God expects that we keep ourselves from those things which would destroy life, and use all proper means of preserving it; so neither can we, of ourselves, preserve the life of our souls; yet are we bound to "keep our heart with all diligence; since out of it are the issues of life."

It is indeed supposed here, that a new heart has been given to us; because from the unregenerated heart no good thing can issue; but inasmuch as even the renewed heart has still innumerable corruptions within it, we must keep it with all diligence.

To impress this duty on our minds, let us consider:

I. The duty enjoined.

"To keep the heart" is indeed an arduous task. To assist you in the performance of it, we will offer such suggestions as appear suitable to the occasion:

1. Fortify your heart with good principles.

An unfortified city is open to assault on every side. In the same way is the heart, if not duly fortified by the principles of true religion. As a sinner redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and sanctified by his Spirit, I am the Lord's peculiar property. I live by him; and I must live for him, "having been bought with a price, I am not my own, but his" who bought me; and I have nothing to do but to "glorify him with my body and my spirit, which are his." When therefore anything attempts to gain possession of my heart, I must keep it for Him; for Him wholly; for Him alone.

Nothing is to break in upon this principle. Let earth and Hell assault me, I must oppose them in this impregnable bulwark, "Depart from me, you evil-doers; I will keep the commandments of my God! [Psalm 119:115](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.115)." The Christian is furnished by God with armor for this contest, [Ephesians 6:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11-16); and, clothed in this panoply, he must maintain the conflict even unto death! [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10).

2. Watch all of your heart's most secret motions.

A citadel, however strong, if filled with traitors waiting for an occasion to open it to the enemy, needs to be guarded with peculiar care; the professed defenders of it must themselves be watched.

In the same way it is with the heart, notwithstanding it is at present garrisoned for the Lord. It is inconceivably difficult in many instances to distinguish between the loyal and the treacherous. They are both dressed in the same uniform; and both make the very same professions; both too appear actuated by the same holy zeal. The Apostles, when disputing with each other who should be the greatest, and forbidding others to cast out devils, because they followed not with them, and desiring to call fire from Heaven to avenge their Master's cause—appeared as faithful as men could be, [Luke 9:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.46); [Luke 9:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.49); [Luke 9:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.54); yet were they in reality actuated by pride and envy, in the garb of zeal and love; and, had not these corrupt passions been checked at first, who can tell, "how great a matter this little fire might have kindled! [James 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.5)."

There is not a motion of the heart but must be strictly marked; its associates must be carefully noticed;  
its tendencies must be examined;  
its professions must be scrutinized;  
lest Satan himself be found there, under the semblance of an angel of light, [2 Corinthians 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13-14).

3. Combine all the heart's energies in the service of your God.

The Psalmist has a remarkable expression on this subject, "Unite my heart, O Lord, to fear your name, [Psalm 86:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.11)." If the powers of the soul are scattered, they will be as inefficient as soldiers that are dispersed. It is by a combination of efforts for a preconcerted end, and by simultaneous movements for its accomplishment, that success is attained. The various powers of the soul must act in unison; the understanding, the will, the affections, the memory, the conscience—must all have the same object in view, each defending its proper post to the uttermost, and ready to support the other with all its might.

If, while the understanding is occupied about spiritual and heavenly things, the will and the affections are running after earthly and carnal things, what can be expected, but that the enemy shall soon gain undisguised and permanent possession of the soul? Every one knows, that "a house divided against itself, falls;" and a divided heart must become a prey to the great adversary of God and man. All its powers must center in God, if God is to inhabit it as his temple, and to possess it as his inheritance.

4. Call in for it the most effectual aid.

Human efforts, unassisted by God, will be of little avail. Indeed we can do nothing but as we are assisted by "the Captain of our Salvation, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)." To him then must we look to "strengthen us with might by his Spirit in our inward man, [Ephesians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.16);" we must go forth against our enemies, as David did against Goliath, not in dependence on an arm of flesh, but in the name of the Lord God of Israel; we must "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)."

Then we may defy all our adversaries; we may boldly ask the greatest among them, "Who are you, O great Mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain." See how Paul taught the first Christians to triumph, while yet in the midst of all their conflicts, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No; in all these things we are more than conquerors! [Romans 8:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-37)" In the same way then may the weakest of us triumph, if we call in our blessed Lord to our aid; for "through Christ strengthening us, we can do all things! [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

But to form a right judgment of our duty, we must yet more distinctly notice:

II. The particular instruction relating to it.

We must:

1. keep our heart

2. with all diligence

1. That is, we must keep our heart **earnestly**.

It is not a slight or superficial attention to it that will suffice. The work is too great to be effected in such a way. To keep the heart from sin amidst so many temptations on every side, and to keep it in the exercise of all holy and heavenly graces, from every one of which it is by nature alienated; this is a great work indeed, and requires the utmost possible exertion on our part.

The metaphors by which the Christian's life is set forth, sufficiently show what efforts are called for on our part.

A race is not to be won without straining every nerve.

An adversary, whether in fight or in wrestling, is not to be overcome without putting forth all our strength.

Can we then suppose, that, when our contest is not with flesh and blood only, but with all the principalities and powers of Hell, the victory can be gained without the most strenuous exertions? No; it cannot; and our Lord plainly tells us that it cannot, "Strive," says he, "to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in, and not be able." Know then, that whatever you have to do in the keeping of your heart, you must "do it with all your might."

2. We must keep our heart **constantly**.

The work which we have to do, is not like that of a painter or a statuary, who may leave his work for a time, and find it afterwards in the state in which he left it; it is rather like that of one who is rolling a stone up hill, which will return upon him, as soon as ever he intermits his labor.

In the same way, our hearts of themselves are "bent to backslide from God," ever ready to "start aside as a deceitful bow;" and Satan is ever on the watch to draw us aside. If he intermits his labors, it is in appearance only, and not in reality; for he is ever "going about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour!" His wiles and devices are innumerable; and, if once he can find us off our guard, he will assuredly avail himself of the occasion to deceive and, if possible, to destroy us.

We therefore must be always "on our watch-tower," according to that direction of our blessed Lord, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation; and, what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!"

3. We must keep our heart **perseveringly**.

There is no state at which we can arrive in this world that supersedes the necessity of continued vigilance and care. Were we as eminent as Paul himself, we must still, like him, "keep our body under control and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, we ourselves become castaways." Let our circumstances be ever so favorable, we know not but that we shall fall the very next moment.

Hezekiah was but just recovered from a dangerous illness, and that by miracle; yet when the Babylonian ambassadors came to offer him their master's congratulations, he fell, and offended God by "the pride of his heart! 2 Chronicles 32:24-26."

Peter also was but just descended from Mount Tabor, where he had beheld his Lord transfigured, and shining forth in all his glory, when he acted Satan's part in dissuading his Lord from completing the work assigned him; so that he drew forth from his Divine Master that just reprimand, "Get behind me, Satan! [Matthew 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.23-24)."

We may add too, that there is no wickedness so great, but we may be enticed to the commission of it. Who can reflect on David's adultery and murder, or on Peter's denial of his Lord with oaths and curses, and not see reason to cry continually to God, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

Thus then we see, it is not enough to keep our hearts, but we must "keep them with all diligence," engaging in the work with earnestness, and maintaining it with constancy and perseverance to the last hour of our lives.

Let us now attend to,

III. The reason with which both the one and the other are enforced.

We must:

1. keep our heart

2. with all diligence

The heart may in some respects be considered as the seat of vitality in the human body, because from thence issues the blood that circulates through the whole frame.

In the same way, it be said of the heart in a spiritual view, that out of it are the issues of life. For,

1. The heart is the proper source of all evil.

There are many evils to which our corrupt nature is apt to yield; some are spiritual, and some are fleshly; but the womb where all are generated, and from whence they proceed, is the heart. Adultery, and murder, and theft, with many other evils, might be supposed to arise rather out of external circumstances connected with our outward man; but they are all traced by our blessed Lord to the heart, "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' [Mark 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21-23)."

Now, if the heart is the fruitful spring of such evils—then ought it not to be watched? Ought it not to be kept with all diligence? It is evident that, without continual care, the whole man would soon be inundated with evil! Should we not then watch the sluices? Should we not guard the banks, and keep them in good repair? In other words, should we not do all in our power to prevent such fatal effects?

Let it never be forgotten, that the smallest breach in a bank will soon yield to the torrent, and, by its extension, bid defiance to any remedy that can be applied. Consequently, if we would not be overrun with all manner of evil, we must guard against the irruption of any. "A little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump."

2. The heart is the proper seat of all good.

Grace is planted in the heart; it has no other residence; it may operate by the members; but its seat is in the heart. Repentance flows from thence, even from "the broken and contrite heart." Faith has there its first formation. "With the heart man believes unto righteousness." Love combines and concentrates all its powers, "We are to love God with all the heart;" yes, "Christ himself dwells in our hearts by faith."

Whatever then proceeds not from the heart, is of no value; all our best services for God are no other than hypocrisy, if the heart is far from him! [Matthew 15:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-8). Must we not then keep the heart with all diligence, to see that it be duly influenced by divine grace, and that all which we do is the result of gracious principles implanted there?

Truly, if "a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and, after all, be no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," because his actions proceed not from a principle of love in the heart—then we are called upon to watch over our hearts with all imaginable care, that they be duly stored with all that is good. This is the plain and obvious inference from what our Lord himself has distinctly affirmed in those memorable words. "The evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil; and the godly man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good;" in both cases the produce is "from the abundance of the heart, [Luke 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.45);" and "the tree is known by its fruits."

3. By the condition of our heart, shall our state be determined in the last day.

Even in courts of judicature among ourselves, it is not so much the act, as the heart, that is the object of investigation. Murder itself is not accounted murder, if it was not attended with a purpose of heart to injure and destroy. Much more therefore may it be expected that God will inquire into the designs and purposes of our hearts, "He does not look on the outward appearance, but at the heart;" and "he searches the heart, and tries the thoughts, on purpose to give to every man according to the fruit of his doings." For this end "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart."

To our hearts then must we look, if ever we would give up our account with joy; for, as our hearts are, so shall we appear in his sight, [Proverbs 23:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.7). Let us then not only search and try ourselves, but beg of God also to "search and try us, and to see if there is any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting."

APPLICATION.

1. Do not grudge your labor in the way to Heaven.

You cannot make any attainments in this life without labor; how then can you hope to attain the glory and felicity of Heaven without it? True it is, that Heaven is a gift of God; a gift altogether of his free and sovereign grace; but it is also true, that we must labor for it, according to that direction of our Lord, "Do not labor for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27)." Labor then with all earnestness, and constancy, and perseverance. If you are frequently foiled, still return to your post, and increase your vigilance in proportion as you discover the deceitfulness and wickedness of your hearts; and be assured, that, however great your toil may be, Heaven will be an abundant recompense for all.

2. Do not doubt but that your labor shall at last be crowned with success.

Were your success dependent on an arm of flesh, you might well despond; but your God and Savior is pledged to "carry on in you the work he has begun," and to "perfect that which concerns you." Your enemies may renew their assaults as often as they will; but they shall not prevail; for God has said, that "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper! [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17);" and again. "The law of God is in his heart; his footsteps shall not slide! [Psalm 37:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.31)." Go on then, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong! [1 Corinthians 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.13);" and know for your comfort what the all-gracious and unchanging God has spoken, "Do not be weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you do not faint! [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9)."

#765

THE LOST SINNER'S RETROSPECT

**[Proverbs 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.12-13)**

"You will say: How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors!"

A time of reflection must come to all; if men shake off all thought until the hour of death, they will not be able to do so when once the soul is separated from the body; their ways will then be brought to remembrance; and all the powers of their minds be fixed upon the contemplation of them. Happily, with many this season arrives before it is too late; and, frequently, the very enormities which have been committed are the means of exciting in the soul a beneficial remorse.

Sometimes the present consequences of sin press heavily upon the mind, and awaken the energies of a sleepy conscience. Thus Solomon supposes many to be affected after they have brought trouble on themselves by their licentious courses; and he urges this very consideration as an argument for guarding against all temptations to sin, that however pleasurable a life of sin may be, the retrospect will be painful in the extreme; and the now thoughtless debauchee "will mourn at the last," in the review of the mercies he has abused, and will say, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!"

We shall not confine our attention to the particular subject treated of in the context, though in every congregation, it is to be feared, there are but too many to whom it would be applicable. We shall rather take occasion from our text to set before you in a more enlarged view,

I. The lost sinner's retrospect.

That we may bring home the subject to every man's bosom, we shall consider men under two distinct classes:

1. Those who already feel some painful consequences of their past conduct.

Among these we must first notice the people more immediately referred to in our text, namely, those who have wasted their property, and injured their constitution, in habits of criminal indulgence, verse 9-11. What reason for regret have they! How glad would they now be, if they had restrained their appetites, and not purchased a momentary gratification at so high a price!

Next to these we may mention the spendthrift, and the gamester, who through covetousness or the love of pleasure have dissipated their fortune, and involved themselves in ruin. How common is it for people so circumstanced to destroy their own lives, and to seek in suicide, a remedy for the evils they have entailed upon themselves! To these we may add the people who by any disgraceful act have blasted their reputation, and rendered themselves liable to just reproach; to such the seasons of reflection are bitter. They attempt perhaps to divert their thoughts by business or pleasure; but they can never cease to rue the day in which they brought upon themselves so heavy a calamity. There are times when all who have entailed misery on themselves will bring to mind the instructions given them in early youth; and then they will, inwardly at least, complain, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!"

2. Those who, though they feel no present pain arising from their sins, are yet sensible that they have not answered the great ends of life.

The necessity of turning unto God, and the means of acceptance with God through the atonement of Christ, have been distinctly set forth from time to time; so that, supposing people to have diligently attended to the Word that has been preached to them, and to have "mixed faith with it," it would have been impossible for them to have continued in the ways of sin and death.

But how many are at this moment as far from God as they were years ago! How many have reason to regret that they have ever heard the Gospel, which, instead of being a savor of life to them, has, through their neglect of it, been made a savor of death unto death! Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that "if he had never come to instruct them, they would not, comparatively, have had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin."

So must it be said to many among us, that having such exalted privileges, they have reason to expect that they shall, with Capernaum, "be cast the deeper into Hell" for their abuse of them! It is a small matter that their sins have not been such as to expose them to shame and reproach among men. Their neglect of Christ, their lack of love to his name, and of zeal in his service, must be reckoned for at the last day, when he will say, "Bring here those who were my enemies, who did not want me to be king over them--bring them here and kill them in front of me! [Luke 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.27)." O painful retrospect! O afflictive prospect!

Brethren, take a review of your past lives; and seek "the things belonging to your peace, before they be forever hidden from your eyes."

What then remains to be done by these distinct, but perishing, classes? To both the one and the other we would say, Consider:

II. The sinner's alternative.

There is but one alternative for any man: we must either attend to the voice of instruction given us in the Gospel—or we must carry with us unchanging and unavailing remorse into the eternal world!

Are we willing to spend eternity in self-condemning reflections?

They must follow us, if we die in our sins. God himself will remind us of the benefits which here we neglected to improve, "Son, remember, that you in your life-time had such and such advantages." What anguish of mind will be occasioned by such thoughts as these: 'I once had the same offers of salvation, as they had who are now before the throne of God! I enjoyed the same heavenly instruction as they; but I despised it, and would not hear the voice of the charmer, however wisely he endeavored to charm me!'

This will be the ground of our heavier "condemnation, that light came into the world, but that we loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil;" and our reflections upon this will be "a never-dying worm," gnawing our conscience to all eternity. Whether our sins were more or less flagrant, this will be the source of our greatest torment: that we despised the instructions given us in the Gospel, and trampled under foot that very Son of God who came into the world to seek and save us.

If we would not spend an eternity in these bitter reflections, we must now attend to the things which are revealed to us in the Gospel.

If our teachers speak out of their own minds, we may refuse to hearken to them; but, if they speak to us the very Word of God, then it is at our peril to turn a deaf ear to their instructions. The Word of God is sufficient to "make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ." It bids us to flee to Christ, as to a strong-hold, where we shall be safe from the assaults of sin and Satan. The gospel assures us:  
that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;"  
that "his blood will cleanse us from all sin;"  
that "his grace is sufficient for us;"  
that "all whom the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out!"

Follow these directions, and you are safe:  
give yourselves up to him;  
live altogether by faith upon him;  
improve for his glory the grace which you receive out of his fullness;  
and you have nothing to fear!

Instead of remorse and sorrow, you shall be filled with peace and joy. In the midst of life, it shall be a matter of "rejoicing to you, that you have the testimony of a good conscience." In a dying hour you shall look back with comfort in the thought of having "fought a good fight, and finished your course, and kept the faith;" and to all eternity shall you glory in the mercies and privileges which you here enjoyed! [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5).

Here then is your alternative:  
Despise this instruction, and you shall perish!  
Obey it, and you shall live forever!

Advice.

1. Endeavor to view everything in the light of eternity.

If you think of time only, the value of present enjoyments will be unduly magnified. But think of eternity, and nothing will be deemed important but the salvation of the soul!

2. Endeavor so to spend each day, as you will wish you had spent it, when you shall be standing at the judgment-seat of Christ.

We know what the wishes are of men who are condemned to death for their violations of the law; and we may be sure that such will be our wishes when we are summoned to meet our Judge: 'O that I had lived a very different life!' Now then cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart, and devote yourselves to him without reserve. So shall you behold his face in peace, and be partakers of his glory for evermore!

#766

THE CAPTIVATING POWER OF SIN

**[Proverbs 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.22)**

"His own iniquities shall ensnare the wicked himself, and he shall be held with the cords of his sins."

The force of habit is well known; it operates as a second nature—so constant is it in its exercise, and so imperious in its demands. There is this difference however in habits of piety—and habits of sin:

Habits of piety are easily lost; but  
habits of sin are with great difficulty overcome.

Nor is this difficult to be accounted for:  
piety is against the course of nature, and  
sin conformable to all of man's innate propensities.

The motion of piety is a continual ascent;  
the motion of sin is downward on a descent.

But it is not merely as a natural consequence that sin, when indulged, has so great a power; there is an additional influence given to it by God himself, as a judicial act, and as a just punishment for indulging it; so that in a judicial, no less than in a natural sense, our text is true, "His own iniquities shall ensnare the wicked himself, and he shall be held with the cords of his sins."

Let us consider,

I. The declaration itself.

"His own iniquities shall ensnare the wicked himself, and he shall be held with the cords of his sins."

In a two-fold view it may be noticed:

1. As a judgment inflicted.

This judgment is inflicted on the whole human race. There is not a sinner in the universe who cannot from his own experience attest the truth of it. Every sin has a power to enslave the mind, and to lead captive him who has indulged it. But we will instance this in some particulars.

The man addicted to drinking previous to the formation of his habit, had perhaps no particular love to strong drink, or desire after it; but he has been drawn into company, he has there acquired a taste for conviviality, and at last, by repeated excesses, he has contracted such a thirst for intoxicating liquors, that he cannot deny himself the use of them, or use them in moderation. He can see his character sinking in the estimation of all the sober part of the community, his health impaired, his fortune injured, his family suffering, and his eternal interests sacrificed; and yet he cannot cast off the wicked habit which he has contracted; his soul is bound with it as with a cord, and he cannot burst his bonds.

In a similar plight is he who has given himself up to the gratification of his lusts and passions. They, at least as far as the mind is concerned, are increased by indulgence, so that every object calls forth desire, and "their eyes are full of adultery, and cannot cease from sin, [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14)." His very soul, as it were, is sensualized, and, whether sleeping or waking, his imagination roves after the gratification of his sinful appetites.

Nor must I omit to mention the gamester, in whom the text is most awfully verified. Nothing can induce him to abandon his ruinous pursuits. Domestic ties of wife and children have no influence at all. The ruin of himself and family are all suspended on a card or dice. Not even the experience of ruin will reclaim him. Let his losses be repaired again and again—and again and again will he return to the fascinating object, like the moth, and hover round it, until he is consumed!

I have mentioned these instances, as being more obvious and acknowledged; but the declaration is equally verified in the mirthful, the worldly, the profane; yes, and in the superstitious and self-righteous also. They all "feed on ashes; and a deceived heart has turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)."

2. As a warning given.

"His own iniquities shall ensnare the wicked himself, and he shall be held with the cords of his sins."

In this view more especially the declaration in our text is introduced, to guard young men against the temptations to which they are exposed, verse 20. And a most awful warning it is; it shows us how earnestly we should guard against our besetting sins. Every man has some "sin which more easily besets him, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1)," and by which he is more in danger of being enslaved. Now every man should find out what this peculiar temptation is; and should watch and pray against it; lest, by yielding to it, he provokes "God to give him over to a reprobate mind, [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28)," and to say, "He is joined to idols; let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)."

We should labor to say with David, "I have kept myself from my iniquity, [Psalm 18:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.23);" and, with Job, "You know I am not wicked," that is, not deliberately and habitually wicked, [Job 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.7). We should dread lest that be inflicted on us which is spoken in the text—a judgment far heavier than any other that can be inflicted on us even by God himself, as long as we continue in this present life; because it is a certain prelude to everlasting misery, and the means of augmenting it every day and hour; for, if we are delivered over to our own lusts, we do nothing but "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath," and accumulate mountains of guilt to sink us deeper and deeper into everlasting perdition! [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5).

Our employment will be like that of those mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah, who "drew out iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as a cart-rope, [Isaiah 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.18);" for, as a rope is spun out continually to an indefinite length by the constant addition of fresh materials, so will our sin be drawn out to an endless extent, until death shall cut it short, and the deserved punishment be given to it.

It would be improper to pass over such a declaration as this without drawing your attention to,

II. The reflections which it naturally suggests.

1. How thankful should we be for the Gospel of Christ!

Heathen are in the bondage above described, and have no conception of any way of deliverance from it. But in the Gospel a Savior is proclaimed; who came on purpose to "preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18)." His power, no lusts can withstand. As Jesus delivered Peter from prison, causing his chains to fall off, and the prison doors to open of their own accord—so he can liberate the slaves of sin and Satan from their bondage, and bring them forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Diseases, devils, elements—all obeyed his voice in the days of Jesus' life; and at his Word the most deep-rooted lusts shall be plucked up, and the most inveterate habits changed! The day of Pentecost sufficiently attests the truth of this assertion. The hands of the men who had crucified him were yet reeking with his blood—yet in an instant were their hearts renewed, and they became altogether new creatures, "the wolf being as harmless as the sheep, and the lion as gentle as the lamb! [Isaiah 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.6)."

However inveterate then your habits may have been, despair not; but look to "that Mighty One on whom your help is laid," and who is able to save "to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

2. How watchful should we be against the first incursions of sin!

As we know not "how great a matter a little fire will kindle," so we know not what evils one sin may introduce. Every evil habit originated in one sin. Judas little thought in what his first act of dishonesty would issue. In the same way, millions, who are now gone beyond the hope of redemption, once thought as little to what a state they should be ultimately brought, as we now do.

Do not say: This angry temper is a light evil. No! It is murder in the seed and embryo; and may terminate in the very act of murder much sooner than you imagine.

Do not say, This impure thought or look is trivial. No! It is incipient adultery; to which it lends, and in which, before you are aware of it, it may soon outcome.

The same I would say of envy, hatred, malice, covetousness, ambition, and the whole catalogue of spiritual lusts! The admission of them into the heart is as is leak in a ship, which will sink it ultimately, if it is not stopped in time. A mariner will not neglect that leak, though it is but small; because he knows the consequences; he knows that if it is neglected, his efforts to preserve the ship will before long be vain and ineffectual.

It is not possible to look around us without seeing, in numberless instances, what dominion the evil tempers of men have gained, and what misery they diffuse throughout their respective families and spheres. Had they been checked in their commencement, how much sin and misery would have been prevented!

If then we would not forge chains for our own souls, let us guard against the first risings of sin. For, whatever we may think, "we shall reap according to what we sow; he who sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting! [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

3. How constant should we be in waiting upon the Lord Jesus Christ, both in his public ordinances, and in secret prayer!

None but Christ can afford us any effectual help; for "without him we can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)." To him we must carry our every trial, and every temptation; and we must plead with him for help, as the Apostle did, until he answers us, and says, "My grace is sufficient for you! [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)." Let us never forget that it is in vain to resist sin in our own strength. None but God himself can subdue it in us. "Our sufficiency even to think a good thought, must be from him, [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5)." If he helps us, it is well. "We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

But if we address ourselves to the purifying of our hearts in our own strength, we shall fail, as the Apostles did, when in self-confidence they attempted to cast out a devil, which "could only be ejected through the influence of prayer and fasting, [Matthew 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.21)." Let us look simply to Christ to purge us both from the guilt and power of our sins; and then we shall find that "according to our faith it shall be done unto us, [Matthew 9:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.29)."

#767

THE SLUGGARD REPROVED

**[Proverbs 6:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.6-11)**

"Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man!"

Foresight in relation to temporal concerns, though not universally practiced, is universally approved; and it is a ground of thankfulness that those classes of society who have hitherto scarcely known how to secure any little sums which they might save, have now, by the establishment of Banks, encouragement to provide for themselves against the day of adversity.

Happy would it be if a similar zeal were now exerted in relation to the concerns of eternity. But here, alas! there is still a sad indifference among us. The needs which we are sure to feel in the eternal world are not anticipated; nor is the importance of providing for them generally felt. In relation to these things, all around us are cast, as it were, into a deep sleep, from which they need to be roused by the most solemn warnings. This address therefore of Solomon to the sluggards of his day may well serve as as a foundation for a similar remonstrance with those who are yet sleeping in security and sin.

Addressing ourselves to people of this description, we will speak:

I. In a way of **humiliating reproof**.

Justly does Solomon observe, that "a sluggard is wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason! [Proverbs 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 26.16)." The more careless men are about their souls, the more confident they are of their eternal safety. But however confident they may be, they may go and learn wisdom from the lowest insect.

There is scarcely anything in the whole creation from which we may not derive the most valuable instruction. The ox and the donkey, the crane and the swallow, are brought forward by God himself to teach and reprove us, [Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.3). [Jeremiah 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.7); and here we are referred for instruction to the ant. She collects in summer the food that is necessary for her subsistence in the winter. She does it with incredible labor, dragging to her cell grains of corn, that one would scarcely conceive she would be able to move. And this she does "without any guide" to direct her, or "overseer" to watch her, "or ruler" to call her to account. And, that her labor may not ultimately prove vain, she bites off, we are told, the ends of every grain, to prevent it from rotting in the ground.

Go now to the ant, you sluggard, and consider her ways:

1. Consider **the ant's wise foresight**.

Has she a time approaching, against which it is needful for her to provide—and have not you? Is there not a time coming, when you must stand in the presence of your God, and give an account of everything that you have done in the body, whether it is good or evil? And have you not now to obtain a righteousness wherein to appear before God, even the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, wherein alone you can ever stand in the presence of a holy God? Have you not a new nature also to obtain, in order to fit you for the enjoyment of the heavenly world? And is not the present, the only time when this provision can be made? If you neglect the present opportunities, will you find them in the eternal world? Is there "any work or device to be executed in the grave, where you are going? [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

If the ant's work, which relates only to the short transient life of the body, is important—then is not yours, which relates to the eternal interests of the soul, much more important! Go then to the ant, and learn wisdom from her.

2. Consider **the ant's voluntary labor**.

She has none to direct her; she is guided by instinct alone. But you have reason to guide you, and to assure you of the certainty and importance of those things which you have not yet seen with your eyes. You have God himself also inspecting everything that you do, and pledged to call you into judgment for it, and to assign you your everlasting portion according to it! Should not you then exert yourselves with all diligence? Are you not convinced, that to prepare for eternity is "a reasonable service"? Yes, that it is, in fact, "the one thing needful?" Will you then grudge your labor? Will you not put forth willingly and habitually all the powers of your souls in this blessed work?

3. Consider **the ant's prudent care**.

Is she careful to prevent her labors from ever proving abortive; and should not you prosecute your work to a successful outcome? Yet Solomon justly observes, that "the slothful man roasts not that which he took in hunting, [Proverbs 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.27)." Yes, that "his very desire kills him, because his hands refuse to labor, [Proverbs 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.25)."

Some kind of pains we all have taken in attending ordinances, and in complying with outward forms; but there we have rested, without any persevering efforts to render those means effectual for the salvation of our souls. We feel somewhat of a general desire after eternal happiness; and with that consciousness of desire we are satisfied, without pressing forward for the attainment of the things desired. Thus is fulfilled in us another declaration of Solomon, "The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, [Proverbs 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.4)." If good desires would suffice, the sluggard would get to Heaven as well as others; but if great and persevering exertions are necessary, he will rather forego the prize, than use the diligence necessary for the attainment of it.

In a word, instead of "looking to himself that he lose not the things that he has wrought, but that he receives a full reward, 2 John verse 8," he allows Satan to take out of his heart the seed that has been sown in it, and to keep him, like the foolish virgins, from providing oil for himself, until it is too late. Say, you sluggard, whether these things be not true of you, and whether you have not need to go and learn wisdom of the diminutive and despised ant?

We will yet further prosecute our address,

II. In a way of solemn warning.

As a man who has no provision independent of his labor, and no disposition to exert himself, must soon feel the pressure of poverty and need—so, sluggard, shall you feel these evils in relation to your soul.

1. Reflect on **the dreadfulness of your eternal state**.

The consequences of your sloth are coming upon you; they are coming gradually indeed, but irresistibly. "A traveler" comes not to his journey's end all at once, but gradually, and almost imperceptibly, by many successive steps. So neither will you find the fatal consequence of your sloth all at once; but every day and hour brings them nearer towards you; and that too so clearly, that, if you would stop to examine—then you should see evident symptoms of their approach.

Who has not found, that the longer he lives in any sin, the more he becomes addicted to it, and enslaved by it? The truth is, that as a man by indulging sloth, whether of mind or body, becomes daily more unfitted for exertion. In the same way, the man who is remiss and negligent in his spiritual concerns becomes daily more alienated from God, and more averse to those efforts that are necessary for his salvation, [Proverbs 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.4); [Proverbs 19:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.15).

The curse which is denounced against him seems so distant, that it will never come; but it is advancing as fast as the wings of time can carry it; as Peter says, "Their judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not! [2 Peter 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.3)."

O sluggard! remember this: you may "linger, like Lot in the plain;" but "your judgment lingers not! You may slumber on yet a little while, but your damnation slumbers not!" The time is fast approaching when God will say to you, as to him who hid his talent in a napkin, "You wicked and slothful servant!" and will give orders concerning you, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! [Matthew 25:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.26); [Matthew 25:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.30)."

These judgments too shall come upon you irresistibly. You well know how entirely a man unarmed and sleeping is at the mercy of "an armed man" who seeks his life. And such will be your state, in the day that God shall deal with you, and visit you for your sins. You may call on the hills to fall upon you, and the rocks to cover you, from the wrath of your offended God; but they cannot perform for you this friendly office. No creature in the universe can help you, "though hand join in hand, you cannot pass unpunished." Reflect on this, you sluggard! Now you may "puff at God's judgments;" but before long you will bitterly regret that you did not improve the opportunities afforded to you to escape from them.

2. Reflect also on **the vanity of your excuses**.

There are none so hardened as to avow a fixed determination never to seek after God; on the contrary, there is in almost all an indistinct purpose to turn unto the Lord at some more convenient season, which they hope is at no very great distance. Hence to those who would rouse them to exertion, they say: "A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep." They acknowledge in general terms the propriety, and even the necessity, of exertion; but they wish a little more time for indulgence to the flesh, before they set themselves in earnest to mortify and subdue it.

But what has been the consequence of indulgence hitherto? Are you at all more disposed for exertion now, than you were when first you were bidden to arise? Is your ability for God's service at all increased by deferring your attempts to serve him? Have you not found, invariably, that procrastination has increased your difficulties, at the very time that it also enfeebled your powers? Do not say then any longer, "There is a lion in the way," nor plead any longer for delay; but arise and call upon your God, if perhaps time may be yet afforded you to "work out your salvation," and to "flee from the wrath to come!"

ADDRESS.

1. Those who have never yet been awakened.

Have you no work to do? Or is it a matter of small importance whether it is done or not? Is not the present life the only time for doing it? "How long then, will you sleep, O sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep?" Don't you know, that if you sleep on until this short life be past, you will assuredly awake in Hell? What then shall I say to you? Shall I say to you, as Christ did to his sleepy disciples, "Sleep on now, and take your rest?" No! God forbid. Let me rather say, "Awake you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light, [Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14)."

Truly, if you would now, even now, call upon his name, it would not be too late. Whatever you lack, it should be given you. God would give you:  
the light of truth to shine into your heart;  
the light of joy in his reconciled acceptance;  
the light of holiness to attest your acceptance with him;  
and the light of glory to perfect your felicity.

While you have the light then, walk in the light, that you may be the children of light.

2. Those who, though in part awakened, are yet disposed to give way to slothful habits.

This, alas! was the case both with the wise and foolish virgins, "they all slumbered and slept." But let me affectionately guard you against yielding to sloth. It is said, and the very best among us know the truth of it by bitter experience, that "the idle soul shall suffer hunger, [Proverbs 19:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.15)." Who has not heard of the vineyard of the sluggard, where, through inattention, nothing was produced but nettles and thorns? To him is the same warning given as to the sluggard in the text, [Proverbs 24:30-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.30-34).

Guard then against the excuses which you are ready to make. See the excuses made by the Bride in the book of Canticles; how injurious to her welfare! how destructive of her peace, [Song of Solomon 5:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.2-7). "Watch then, and pray always."

Had the disciples watched, when they were directed to do it by their Lord, they would never have forsaken him as they did in the hour of his deepest trial. But, if you do not watch and be sober, depend upon it that Satan will prevail against you, and "sift you as wheat." "Be sober then, and vigilant." Give not way to drowsiness in your spiritual calling; but "give all diligence to make your calling sure." And, seeing that you look for a period when God shall come to judge the world, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless. And "What I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch!"

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LOVE TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES INCULCATED

**[Proverbs 7:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 7.1-4)**

"My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding your kinsman."

Throughout the book of Proverbs, we are strongly reminded of that expression of Paul to Philemon, "Although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love."

There is an exquisite tenderness in the exhortations of Solomon, addressed as they are by a father to a son. Not that we are to suppose that they were intended only for Rehoboam; they were intended for the people of God, in all ages; and to us, no less than to Rehoboam himself, is the affectionate language of our text addressed.

But indeed a greater than Solomon is here! As mild as the expressions are, they are addressed to us by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is Wisdom itself incarnate, [Proverbs 8:22-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.22-32)," and his are the counsels which we are so earnestly entreated to treasure up in our minds.

In discoursing on the words before us, we will show,

I. The respect which we should pay to the counsels of Divine Wisdom.

By comparing our text with similar language in the New Testament, we see that by the terms here used we have to understand, not the Decalogue only, but the whole revealed will of God.

1. To whatever the counsels of God relate, they should be **treasured up with diligence**.

Whatever is of more than ordinary value in our eyes, we lay it up with care in a place of safety; and the more of it we can amass, the richer we feel ourselves to be.

Now there is nothing in the whole universe to be compared with the Scriptures of truth—nothing that will so enrich the mind, nothing that will so benefit the soul. In the great mystery of redemption "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The precepts too, and the promises, and the histories, and the examples, O! who can estimate them as they deserve? To treasure these up in our minds should be our daily and most delightful employment! Not a day should pass without adding to this blessed stock. We should always furnish ourselves with some fresh portion of scripture on which to ruminate. Not that it is merely in the mind and memory that we are to store up this wealth, but, as Moses tells us, in our heart and in our soul, "You shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul! [Deuteronomy 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18);" this is the proper seat of Divine knowledge; and here should we endeavor to amass the only true wealth, "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

2. To whatever the counsels of God relate, they should be **watched over with care**.

Nature has made peculiar provision for the eye, so that, by an involuntary and instantaneous motion of the eye-lid, it is preserved from innumerable injuries which it must otherwise sustain. Now with the same care that we guard "the apple of our eye," we should watch over and preserve the treasures of wisdom, which we have accumulated in our hearts.

Satan is ever laboring to "take out of our hearts the word of life," as our Lord has told us in the parable of the Sower; and it requires the utmost vigilance on our part to defeat his efforts.

Indeed the heart itself is but too prone to lose its riches through any apertures by which the world has entered; so that we need to "give the most earnest heed lest at any time we should let them slip, [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1)." Besides, if we are not constantly on our guard against "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches," and other foolish and hateful lusts, we shall find to our cost, that these "weeds and thorns will choke all the good seed that has been sown in our hearts, and will render it unfruitful." Our care and watchfulness therefore should be incessant, that nothing is permitted to rob us of our good principles, or to weaken their influence on our souls. If, as we are told, God "himself keeps his people as the apple of his eye, [Deuteronomy 32:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.10) and [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8)," surely we should exercise all possible vigilance to keep his counsels, and preserve inviolate his holy commandments.

3. To whatever the counsels of God relate, they should be **kept ready for use**.

It is not sufficient that we have reduced the counsels of God, as it were, to certain heads, and made memorandums of them in our books, so as to be able to refer to them when occasion requires. We should have them "inscribed on the tablet of our hearts," so that they may be always at hand, ready to direct and regulate our ways. Conscience, by looking inward, should be able to see them in an instant, and to suggest the line of conduct conformable to them.

Moreover, we should have them "bound also upon our fingers," so as both to be reminded of them at all times, and be ever ready to carry them into execution. To this effect Solomon explains his meaning, "My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life! [Proverbs 6:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.20-23)."

4. To whatever the counsels of God relate, they should be **guarded with the tenderest affection**.

With people standing in near and dear relation to us, we are accustomed to live in habits of intimacy, consulting them on any occasions of difficulty, paying considerable deference to their judgment, and easily influenced by their opinions. Now in this light:  
we should view the counsels of our God;  
we should be familiar with them;  
we should consult them on all occasions, and  
yield them a willing ascendency over our hearts.

Instead of standing aloof from them as strangers, we should claim, and glory in, our relation to them. We should "say unto Wisdom, You are my sister; and call Understanding our kinswoman." We should, by our conformity to the dictates of Wisdom, prove, and manifest, our relation to her; and constrain all who behold us to acknowledge that God is our Father, and that Christ, "the Wonderful Counselor," is our Friend!

To encourage this acquaintance with the Divine counsels, we will proceed to state,

II. The **benefits** which we shall derive from a due attention to the counsels of God.

In our text itself, the great benefit of complying with the exhortation is stated, in short but comprehensive terms, "Keep my commandments and live!" But in the verses following our text, a particular advantage is insisted on, namely, the being delivered from the snares and temptations to which we are exposed. That we may comprehend both, we would observe, that by our attention to the Divine counsels,

1. We shall be delivered from evil.

"From the way of the evil woman" is particularly noticed, both here and in the preceding chapter; and surely an attention to the counsels of Wisdom will eventually secure us against those temptations which lead captive so great a portion of mankind!

But we need not confine our views to iniquities of one kind only; the advice here given is equally useful in preserving men from snares of every kind. From the inspired volume we learn the folly and malignity of every sin.

The temptations of the world,  
the lusts of the flesh,  
and the devices of Satan,  
are all there exposed! And armor is provided for us, that we may successfully maintain the combat against them.

Our blessed Lord himself, in whom was no sin, drew from this armory the arrows and the shield with which he vanquished the tempter in the wilderness; and from the same source must we also be furnished. Thus David tells us, "How shall a young man cleanse his way? Even by taking heed thitherto according to your word!" "Your word have I hidden within my heart, that I might not sin against you!" Would you then be kept from evil tempers, and evil passions, and evil habits of every kind? Study the sacred records; treasure up in your minds the terrors of God's wrath as there revealed, and the declarations of his mercy as there promulgated. There see the wonders of redeeming love unfolded to your view, and the blessedness of those who have been monuments of converting and saving grace.

Let every part of God's Word have its proper bearing on your hearts and consciences, and it shall be effectual for your salvation. Whatever lusts you have hitherto indulged, you shall, through the influence of the Word, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, be sanctified; as our Lord has said, "Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth!" "Now you are clean through the Word that has been spoken unto you."

2. We shall be carried forward in safety to everlasting life.

So says our text, "Keep my commandments, and live." So also says our blessed Lord, "I know that your commandment is life everlasting! [John 12:49-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.49-50)." We must remember, that it is not of mere morality that we are now speaking, but an impartial attention to the whole revealed will of God. And where this is, God will surely pour out upon the soul his richest blessings. Hear what our blessed Lord says respecting this, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he who loves me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him!" "We will come to him, and make our abode with him! [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." What unspeakable benefits are these! Favored with such communications, what can we lack?

But it is not in this world only that such people are blessed; for to them are secured all the blessedness and glory of the world to come; according as it is written, "Blessed are those who obey his commandments, that they may have a right to eat of the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city! [Revelation 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.14)." This right indeed is not founded on any merit of their own; but solely on the promises of God made to them in Christ Jesus. It is Christ who, by his obedience unto death, has purchased these blessings for us; but it is to his obedient servants only that these blessings shall ever be given. They however shall inherit them; nor shall all the powers of darkness be able to rob them of their promised inheritance. Only "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.16)," and you shall never be straitened, [Proverbs 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.21-23); [Proverbs 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.12), "nor ever fall; but have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11)."

#769

ADDRESS PREPARATORY TO CONFIRMATION

[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 for further information from the Church of England.]

**[Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.17)**

"I love those who love me. Those that seek me early, shall find me."

These are the words of our blessed Lord, verse 22-31, who, under the name of Wisdom, addresses himself to the children of men, verses 4, 5, and urges them to receive instruction from him verses 32, 33. But to the young they are more particularly directed; and it is for their encouragement more especially that I have selected them for our consideration at this time.

Two things they declare to us most explicitly:

I. Who they are that already enjoy God's favor.

God in some respects may be said to love the whole world, even in their present degenerate state; for "he so loved them, that he gave his only-begotten Son for them." But there are some who are more particularly the objects of his favor. Mark,

1. The description given of them.

"They love the Lord Jesus Christ."

They know his character, as set forth in the Holy Scriptures.

They know him to be the only, and all-sufficient Savior of fallen man.

They have seen and felt their obligations to him, and have sought for redemption altogether through the blood of his cross.

They live in daily habits of communion with him.

They have a good hope of acceptance with God through him.

And his very name "is precious to their souls".

2. The love he bears towards them.

"He loves them," and looks with peculiar delight upon them, "rejoicing over them with joy, and resting in his love, and rejoicing over them with singing, [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17)." To them he delights to "manifest himself, as he does not unto the world, [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23)," even to "come and sup with them, [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20)," and "make his abode with them"

"He rejoices over them to do them good, [Jeremiah 32:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40-41)" imparting all needful supplies of grace and strength to their souls, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7); [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16), and ordering all things both in Heaven and earth for the promotion of their welfare, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). He accounts them "his jewels [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17)," and "his peculiar treasure [Exodus 19:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.5);" and esteems the salvation of their souls a rich recompense for all the sufferings he ever endured! [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2). [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11). For them does he interest himself day and night in Heaven; ever "making intercession for them" with his Father, and preparing kingdoms for them, which they in due season shall inherit, in glory and felicity similar to his own [John 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2). [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

O! who among you does not desire to partake of this blessedness?

But as among you there must be many who are not yet in this blessed state, and who yet desire to participate this happy lot, we proceed to show,

II. Who they are that shall certainly obtain it.

In some respects it may be said, that "He is found of them that sought him not, and made known to them that inquired not after him." But no person is authorized to hope for a saving interest in his favor, unless he seeks after it. The promise is, "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find."

The people to whom the promise is more especially made, are "those who seek him early."

Those who seek the Lord even "at the eleventh hour" shall not be cast out, [Matthew 20:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.6-7); but those who in the early dawn of their day are found desirous of entering into the service of their Lord, shall surely be employed by him. The very circumstance of their seeking the Lord while yet they are free from the cares of this life, and before their souls are vitiated with its sinful pleasures, while their consciences are yet tender, and their hearts open to every good impression, is a strong presumption in their favor. We should be ready, without any express promise from God, to say, that such people "shall never seek his face in vain." But we have an absolute promise in their favor; we can assure them from God himself, that they "shall never fail."

"They," says our Lord, "shall find me".

Yes, he will delight to visit them. They are "the lambs which he will carry in his bosom, [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11);" "the little ones, whom he will never suffer to perish, [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14). [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)."

Though they are weak both in knowledge and in grace, "he will not despise the day of small things, [Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.10)." He says, "Let the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." And when he sees them flocking around him, he will "take them up in his arms, and put his hands upon them, and bless them, [Mark 10:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.14-16)." When he saw only "some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel" in the heart of young Abijah, he noticed it with a distinguishing mark of his favor, [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13); and how much more will he, when he sees "the babes desiring the sincere milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby," and actually growing in stature up to young men and fathers! Truly their hosannahs, however despised by men, shall enter into his ears with acceptance, and their prayers shall return in "showers of blessings" upon their souls! [Luke 19:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.40). They shall "find him" here an ever-present help, and hereafter their inestimable and everlasting portion!

ADDRESS.

1. To the **young people** here assembled.

You are about to be confirmed. But do you know what confirmation is? You were consecrated to the Lord in your baptism; and a solemn engagement was then entered into in your behalf, that you should love him, end surrender up yourselves entirely to his service. This vow you are now going to take upon yourselves. Tell me whether in my text you have not all the encouragement that your souls can desire? Give yourselves to the world, and you will inherit only vanity; but "seek to love the Lord, and you shall inherit durable riches, verse 21."

Think how happy you will be through life, when you are the objects of the Savior's care and love. And think how happy you will be in death. O let me not plead with you in vain! but "remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, in which you shall say that you have no pleasure in them, [Ecclesiastes 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.1).", "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near! [Isaiah 55:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.6)."

2. To **parents**, and those who have an opportunity of influencing the minds of young people.

This is a favorable opportunity for you to exert yourselves, and to concur with your minister in his labors of love. Be laborers together with him, with all your might. But do not forget that the glorious truths in our text are to be experienced by you also; And, if much of your day is already past, be the more earnest now in "redeeming the time" that yet remains to you.

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WISDOM'S ADDRESS TO MEN

**[Proverbs 8:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.27-31)**.

"I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind."

The Proverbs of Solomon are a rich compendium of moral precepts, suited to men in all the various situations of civil, social, and domestic life. Some intimations indeed there are of Evangelical doctrines; but they are neither numerous, nor distinct; the scope and intent of the author having been, not so much to enlighten the minds of men with respect to principles of religion, as to supply them with a code of sacred ethics, for the regulation of their conduct.

Yet, in the chapter before us, the language is so peculiar, as to have induced the most able commentators to think, that there was in the author's mind an intentional departure from his accustomed plan, and a designed reference to Christ, the Savior of the world. It is not our object to decide this point, but, rather, to exhibit the passage in such a view, as may render it most conducive to our spiritual improvement.

Let us consider then,

I. What is that wisdom which here addresses us.

The two leading views of it will come under our consideration, if we interpret it as importing,

1. Wisdom personified.

It is evident that, throughout the whole chapter, Wisdom is represented as a person, and it must be spoken of as a person, in order to give scope for such a representation of it as is contained in our text. We beg this to be particularly noticed; because it is the sole ground of the following statement; which, if that circumstance were overlooked, might appear fanciful.

Wisdom was then ever "with God, as one brought up with him." It is an essential perfection of his nature, attendant on him on all occasions as a counselor, without whose advice nothing was ever transacted from all eternity. God has never done anything from the mere impulse of his own sovereign will and pleasure; whatever he has predestined, has nevertheless been "wrought according to the counsel of his own will, [Ephesians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.5); [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10). Wisdom has presided in all his councils; nor has anything ever been carried into effect without having previously received her sanction.

Wisdom's deliberations have been very mainly conversant about the affairs of men. God foresaw that man would fall, and, if left to himself, would perish like the fallen angels. But he greatly desired to save man, if only it might be accomplished consistently with his own perfections. Every one of his attributes concurred in the wish; but with some of them there seemed to be claims, which interfered with that object, and which could not by any means be set aside.

Holiness required that its hatred of sin should be fully known.

Justice required satisfaction for the violations of God's law, and could never be induced to relax its demands.

Truth also desired that its honor should not be compromised.

It had no objection to the exercise of mercy, if only the sacred Word of God might be kept inviolate; but it could never consent, whatever object were to be attained thereby, that the immutable God should be "made a liar, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10)."

In this difficulty, all looked to Wisdom, to know whether she could devise any way, whereby the exercise of mercy might consist with the rights of all the other attributes of God. Wisdom intimated that she had a plan to propose; a plan, whereby Mercy might have free scope for exercise, not only without invading or injuring the rights of any other attribute, but to the great advantage of them all, insomuch that all should be honored to an infinitely greater extent than they ever could have been, if their demands had been satisfied through the destruction of the whole human race.

It proposed that the Son of God himself should take upon him the sins of men, and suffer, as man's substitute, all that Truth and Holiness had denounced against him, and all that the most rigorous justice could require. Such a sacrifice made to law and justice, to truth and holiness, would put on all of them an honor, which they could never by any other means obtain.

Her proposal, made with infinite delight to herself, was heard with infinite delight by Almighty God. While she was thus, by anticipation, "rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth and her delights were with the sons of men. she was daily God's delight, and rejoiced always before him." We may be assisted in our meditations on this subject, by considering a philosopher occupied with the deepest investigations, and crowned with unexpected success; what joyous exultation fills his bosom! how is he ready to proclaim to all the world, "I have found it! I have found it!"

Or perhaps we shall approximate nearer to the point, if we conceive of a physician, on whose skill the life of thousands is depending, discovering an antidote that will arrest the progress of the plague, and a remedy that will restore to health all those who are already infected with it—what pure and holy joy will animate his soul!

But the Scripture itself furnishes us with various illustrations of this important idea; the woman finding the piece of money which she had lost, and the shepherd his sheep that had strayed from the fold, are each represented as calling for the sympathetic joys of their friends and neighbors; and, as these are intended to elucidate the joy which our Redeemer feels in the successful execution of his office, they may well serve to illustrate the ineffable delight which the proposals of Wisdom are represented as exciting in her own bosom, and in the bosom of God.

But we have said that Wisdom may also be interpreted as signifying:

2. Wisdom incarnate.

Most Commentators think that the expressions in our text refer to Christ, who is called "the Wisdom of God. [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24);" and who, as the Logos or Word, declares to men the hidden counsel of the Father.

Of him it is distinctly said, that He "was with God, and was God [John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1-3) with [Hebrews 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.10);" that "He made all things; and that without him nothing was made that was made." Here then we have the precise language of our text applied to the Son of God, who was from all eternity "in the bosom of the Father [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18)," concurring with him in all that ever he planned or executed, [John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.19); [John 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.38).

How he was occupied in the concerns of men, is familiar to all our minds. Truly "his delights were with the sons of men," whom he determined to rescue from perdition, and to "redeem unto God by his own blood." This was "the joy that was set before him, for which he engaged to endure the cross, and despised all the shame that should ever be poured upon him, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." No sacrifice was too great for him to make. Was it necessary that satisfaction should be made for all the breaches of God's law; and that the very nature that had sinned should suffer? Jesus willingly engaged to lay aside his own glory, and to assume our nature, in order that he might suffer, and, by suffering in our stead, "make reconciliation for our iniquities."

In understanding this mysterious office, he was filled, as his Father also was, with ineffable delight. What joy the thought of ransoming our fallen race excited in his bosom, we are told by the Psalmist; for when it was declared by the Father, "with whom the council of peace was held, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13)," that all creature-sacrifices would be insufficient for the occasion, he instantly replied, "Lo, I come; (I, your co-equal, co-eternal Son, come:) I delight to do your will, O my God! yes, your law is within my heart, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8) with [Hebrews 10:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-9)."

A corresponding joy sprang up also in the Father's bosom; as the prophet Isaiah tells us; for in the contemplation of the future accomplishment of this mystery, the Father, looking with infinite delight on his Son who had undertaken the office, and on his people as accepted in and through him, said, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights! [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1)." And, at the time when he bore an audible testimony to his Son from Heaven, it was in these words, "This is that my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased! [Matthew 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.17)." Thus, in reference to this great event, it is said in our text, "I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;" and in reference to the same we must understand that declaration of our Lord himself, "You loved me before the foundation of the world! [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24)."

Thus, whether we understand the address as made to us by Wisdom personified, or Wisdom incarnate—we cannot but feel a deep interest in all that it has spoken to us, and set ourselves carefully to ascertain,

II. Our duty in reference to it.

Doubtless we should "hearken to its voice," and with child-like simplicity receive its loving instructions. We should,

1. Delight ourselves in the contemplation of wisdom.

Wisdom generally, wisdom universally, should be the object of our continual pursuit, "through a desire of attaining it, we should separate ourselves, and seek all wisdom, [Proverbs 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.1)."

The works of creation should, as far as we have a capacity for such subjects, be investigated by us, in order to excite our admiration of that wisdom by which they were framed.

The order and harmony of the heavenly bodies,  
the beauty and richness of this terraqueous globe,  
the exquisite workmanship of the human frame,  
together with the powers and faculties of our immortal souls, all open to us such inexhaustible stores of wisdom and knowledge, as, if duly explored, will strike with reverential awe the humble inquirer, and fill with devoutest gratitude the admiring soul.

The works of Providence also, if once we are enabled to view them in their mutual relation and dependence, will transport the soul with wonder, and overwhelm it with the deepest sense of gratitude.

No book in the universe, except the Bible, will convey half so much instruction to the mind, as may be gathered from a man's own experience of God's dealings with him, especially in the concurrence of his providence with the operations of his grace; and the man who has learned to read this book, and become conversant with its contents, has acquired "secrets of wisdom, which are double, [Job 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.6)," yes, which are tenfold greater than any which are known to the merely natural man.

God has said, that "he has abounded towards his people in all wisdom and prudence, [Ephesians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.8);" but "his secrets are with those alone who fear him, [Psalm 25:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.14). [Hosea 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.9);" none others are at all able to appreciate his love; that "knowledge is plain only to him who understands, verse 9."

Our chief attention however must be directed to that adorable Savior, who "spoke as never man spoke." and in whom his most inveterate enemies could not find a flaw [John 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.46). In him we have such lessons of wisdom as the whole universe besides does not afford. In tracing all the circumstances of his life, we should do well at every step to inquire: What answer should I have given? What conduct should I have pursued? And, from such examinations frequently repeated, we shall learn at last, how far we are removed from true righteousness, and how much "folly is bound up in our hearts!"

In a word, we should sit at the feet of Jesus, as Mary did, drinking in, with insatiable avidity, the instructions of Wisdom, and applying our hearts to them as the clay to the seal. "In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3)." In Him is revealed to us "the mystery that was hidden from ages and generations," and "which the angels themselves desire to look into, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12);" and the mystery, at the first intimation of which, long "before the worlds were made, the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God, the holy angels, shouted aloud for joy, [Job 38:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 38.6-7)." No sooner was the commission given to make this known to men, than a host of the heavenly angels left their bright abodes, and came down to earth exulting, "Glory to God in the highest! and on earth peace; good will towards men! [Luke 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.13-14)."

These are contemplations worthy of our exalted powers, worthy of our high destinies; and to delight ourselves in them is the wisdom, and the happiness of man.

2. Surrender up ourselves to wisdom's dictates.

In every duty of life there is need of the suggestions of wisdom. Even good men often act a very foolish part, for lack of a well-regulated mind. Many have no idea of that important truth, "I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence, verse 12." To "walk in wisdom towards those who are outside, 1 [Colossians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.5)," and to "give no offence either to the Jews, or to the Gentiles, or to the Church of God, [1 Corinthians 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.32)". These things do not come into the contemplation of many, any more than if no such things were required of us, and no such example had been ever set us. But our determination, through God's help, should be, under all circumstances, like that of David, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way! [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)."

In fact, there is no true wisdom but that which is practical. The very end of knowledge is practice; and, however deep or exalted our speculations may be, "if we do not walk wisely, we are fools, [Ephesians 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.15)." But, in order to carry into effect the lessons of Wisdom, we must "watch daily at her gates, and wait at the posts of her doors, verse 34." We must bring our views, our desires, our motives, to the strictest scrutiny of the Word. We must apply to everything "the line of judgment, and the plummet of righteousness;" and, above all, we must beg of God to give us "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and to make us quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3)." Without this, we shall continually err; without this, we shall inevitably fall. "Hear then the voice of Wisdom, O you children!"

1. Hear the voice of Wisdom, you children in **age**.

You can never begin too early to listen to the counsels of Wisdom. It is by them alone that you can avoid the snares of a corrupt heart, and of a deceitful world. O! think what dangers are before you! See "what multitudes are walking in the broad road that leads to destruction, and how few there are that walk in the narrow path that leads unto life!" And remember, that "you must reap according to what you sow; if you sow to the flesh—then you must of the flesh reap corruption; but if you sow to the Spirit—then you shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

Do not say that you are too young to receive wisdom's lessons; for she particularly encourages you by expressing a more than ordinary solicitude for your welfare, "I love those who love me," says she, "and those who seek me early, shall find me verse 17."

2. Hear the voice of Wisdom, you children in **understanding**.

The poor, whose intellectual powers have never been expanded by the aid of education, are ready to imagine that it is in vain for them to explore the depths of heavenly wisdom. But be it known to all, that divine wisdom enters, not by the head, like earthly knowledge, but by the heart. Be it known also, that divine wisdom is not acquired by deep laborious research, as human sciences are, but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit; for "the Lord gives wisdom; out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding, [Proverbs 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.6);" and so far are the poor from having any reason to despair of attaining it, that they are by far the most likely to obtain it, because they are more willing than others to be taught of God.

Hence our Lord himself says. "I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight! [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26)." Pray then to God to "give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18)," and be assured "it shall be given to you, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5)," and you shall be made "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ."

3. Hear the voice of Wisdom, you children in **grace**.

You have begun to know the value of wisdom; you have a little glimmering view of those great mysteries, of which we have been speaking. "The day-star has arisen in your hearts," and you have found "the ways of Wisdom to be ways of pleasantness and peace." But you must "go on unto the perfect day," even until Christ himself, "the Sun of righteousness, arises upon you with healing in his wings."

O seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!" Be constant in your attendance on the ordinances of God. Search the Scriptures, and treasure them up in your hearts. Above all, "be instant in prayer" for fresh supplies of the Spirit of Christ; then shall you be guided into all truth; and "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days!"

#771

THE VALUE OF TRUE WISDOM

**[Proverbs 8:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.35-36)**

"Whoever finds me, finds life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord. But he who sins against me, wrongs his own soul. All who hate me, love death!"

It is common in the prophetic writings to find expressions which really relate to the Messiah, while they apparently speak only of some other person or thing; and while other expressions in the same passage have no proper reference to Him at all. It is impossible not to notice this in the 22nd and 69th Psalms, and in many other places which are quoted in the New Testament as referring to him. The same mode of speaking may be observed in the chapter before us. In some parts of it, true religion seems to be characterized under the term "Wisdom;" but in others, Christ himself. From the 22nd to the 31st verse, the language cannot well be interpreted as designating religion, nor even an attribute of God; it can only be understood of God's eternal Son, who lay in the bosom of the Father, and before the foundation of the earth rejoiced in the prospect of becoming an inhabitant of this globe, for the salvation of sinful man.

Yet, on the whole, we apprehend, that the exhortation to Wisdom at the beginning of the chapter speaks rather of piety as the proper object of our pursuit. We are sure that this is the general import of the term throughout the book of Proverbs; and that piety, as personified under this name, frequently addresses us. We rather lean therefore to the safe side in our interpretation of the text, than ground upon it any observations which may appear forced, or unwarranted by the text itself.

Two things then we shall be led to notice:

I. The benefit of seeking true wisdom.

Wisdom, whether relating to temporal or eternal things, is never found by chance; it must be sought by persevering inquiries, and be obtained as the fruit of diligent research. To those who do find it, it will be productive,

1. True wisdom produces **present happiness**.

By "life" we may understand happiness; and then the first clause of our text will exactly correspond with what is more diffusely stated in the third chapter, [Proverbs 3:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.13-18). In this sense the term occurs elsewhere. See [Proverbs 22:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.4). [1 Thessalonians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.8). Until we have attained true wisdom, we know not what real happiness means, "There is no peace," says God, "to the wicked." As for the mirth which the men of this world enjoy, it is only "like the crackling of thorns under a pot;" it blazes for a moment, and then goes out. He who knows perfectly what is in man, says, "Even in mirth their heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness, [Proverbs 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.33)."

But when once they have just views of Christ, and are truly devoted to him, they are filled with "a peace that passes all understanding," and, at times, with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Now they begin to know what life is, "they truly pass from death unto life." Their former was little better than a state of mere animal existence; but now they see the true end, and taste the true enjoyment, of life; they participate in a measure, the blessedness of Heaven itself.

We appeal to those who have ever known what it is to "live by faith in the Son of God," and to feel the constraining influence of his love, whether one hour of "fellowship with the Father and the Son" does not outweigh whole years of fellowship with sin and sinners.

2. True wisdom produces **future happiness**.

"No favor can we find with God," until we are brought to the possession of true wisdom, [Isaiah 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.11). But instantly on our embracing his dear Son as he is revealed in the Gospel, we are numbered among "his peculiar people," whom "he has set apart for himself," and esteems as "his jewels." Then there is no favor that he will not show them; he will come down and "make his abode with them, and sup with them." He will "keep them with all the care and tenderness with which we keep the apple of our eye;" and he will administer to them, in every hour of trial, whatever shall be most suited to their necessities, [Psalm 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.12).

In the hour of death especially, "when they are going, as it were, through fire and water, he will be with them;" and, on the instant of their release from this mortal body, he will transport them on the wings of angels to his blessed abode, there to behold and participate in his glory to all eternity. But who can form any idea of the blessings he will then bestow! It is sufficient for us to know that his Word is pledged, and that what he has promised, he is able also to perform.

If such is the value of true wisdom, what must be,

II. The folly of neglecting true wisdom.

Sin of every kind is an act of hostility against sound wisdom; and, if the sin is willful, it is an evidence that our hostility proceeds from a rooted hatred of vital godliness. There is the same mutual opposition, and irreconcilable enmity, between sin and holiness, as between darkness and light; they cannot consist together, nor can the love of both find room to dwell in one bosom.

1. If we allowedly neglect true wisdom—then we "wrong our own souls".

The soul has strong and just claims, which every sinner resists. As being of a higher nature, and endued with larger capacities, than the body, it claims that the body should submit to its authority. As being the only seat of intelligence, it claims that the body follow its guidance. As being immortal, and doomed to spend an eternity in inconceivable happiness or misery—it claims that the body consult its interests.

But when the voice of wisdom is silenced, and sin is permitted to rule in our mortal body—then is the soul wronged in every respect:  
its authority is slighted;  
its counsel is rejected;  
its interest is sacrificed;  
it is even made the drudge and slave of the body, to execute its devices and to gratify its lusts!

Who does not see, that if any man, for the gratification of avarice, should resist the natural claims of the body for food and clothing—that he would be justly and universally condemned? And does he act less foolishly, who, in the manner before mentioned, wrongs his soul? Yes rather, is not his folly greater in proportion as his soul is of greater value? Truly this is a just picture of one who sins against true wisdom.

2. If we allowedly neglect true wisdom—then we "love death!"

Can anyone, it may be asked, love death? We answer. No, not for its own sake; but, as connected with sin, he may. There is an inseparable connection between life and holiness on the one hand, and sin and death on the other. Could sin and Heaven be allied, and enjoyed together, surely every sinner would prefer it. But that is impossible. A specific and unalterable option is given us; and every man is perfectly free to choose the one and refuse the other, to adhere to the one and renounce the other. The sinner determines for himself; and by his determination declares his preference; he practically says, "If I cannot have the gratifications of sin without death—then welcome death, welcome damnation! For sin I will have, whatever be the consequence!"

Mark strongly here God's own appeal. "Why will you die? [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11) compared with [Acts 13:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.46) and [Proverbs 15:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.32)." Now can one reflect a moment on such a choice as this, and not stand amazed at the folly that determines it? Will it bear an argument? Are not the excuses with which it is veiled—mere vain and empty delusions? And does not every one see the folly of them, the very moment he sets himself to serious consideration? Yet this is the conduct which men call wisdom; but which, if it obtained in relation to worldly affairs, they would call downright madness.

"Suffer now, brethren, a word of exhortation," while I address myself,

1. To the despisers of true wisdom.

Consider a little more attentively, what it is that you despise. The thing to which you are exhorted is, to seek acceptance with an offended God; to embrace the salvation which he offers us in the Son of his love; and to devote yourselves to him in a way of holy obedience! Is there anything in this that merits hatred and contempt? Is there anything that should make a man choose damnation rather than submit to it? What if an ungodly world has agreed to call it folly—is it therefore folly? Has not God said, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom?" Is there a saint in Heaven, or on earth, that does not account it wisdom? Yes, is there a soul even in Hell itself that is not now of the same mind?

We go farther still, and ask: Whether those who most deride religion now, will not be convinced of its excellence the very moment that their soul is required of them? "How long then, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?" "Turn at my reproof," says God, "O you simple, understand wisdom; and, you fools, be of an understanding heart! [Proverbs 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.22-23); [Proverbs 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.5)." Do not say: "It is too soon for me to seek the Lord." It is never too soon to be wise; and they who seek the Lord in their youth, have peculiar encouragement from him to do so, "I love those who love me; and they that seek me early, shall find me verse 17."

2. To those who profess to have found true wisdom.

Men will judge of saving religion, not by what the Bible says of it, but by what they see in those who profess it; and one instance of folly in the Lord's people will do more to prejudice them against religion, than a thousand good actions to recommend it. I would therefore strongly urge those who profess godliness, to bear in mind how much the interests of religion depend on them.

Real piety consists not in talkativeness or eccentricities of any kind, but in a devout regard to God's honor and authority, and a wise, prudent, circumspect deportment before men.

It does not approve us in an officious assumption of the duties of others, but in a punctual performance of those which belong to our own place and station, "I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence, verse 12." The not attending to this declaration has caused much offence in the world; and it befits us to be very careful of casting stumbling-blocks before men, or "causing the way of truth to be evil spoken of." Let us then "walk in wisdom towards them that are outside;" "giving no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." And while we adopt the resolution of David, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)," let us remember by whose strength alone we can effect this; and pray with him, "O give me understanding in the way of godliness!"

#772

WISDOM'S FEAST

**[Proverbs 9:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 9.1-6)**

"Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her food and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding."

In the New Testament, parables abound. In the Old Testament, they are comparatively rare. But this comes commended to us by peculiar authority, in that our blessed Lord repeatedly borrowed it, if I may so speak, and adopted it on different occasions, for the elucidating of the truths which he wished to convey. See [Matthew 22:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.1-4). [Luke 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.16-17). In order to unfold it to you, I shall notice separately,

I. The feast prepared.

In the Holy Scriptures, the term Wisdom is generally used to signify true religion; but sometimes it is a name given to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is, with good reason, supposed to be characterized by it in the chapter that precedes my text, [Proverbs 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.1); [Proverbs 8:22-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.22-31), and who, I think, is intended by it in the parable before us. He is "the Wisdom of God, [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24);" and "in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3);" and, beyond all doubt, he is the person who, in the parables which he himself has founded on this, both furnishes the feasts and sends forth the invitations.

1. By Wisdom, the banqueting-house is built.

Solomon elsewhere speaks of a "banqueting-house," where he had been accustomed to meet his Savior, [Song of Solomon 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.4); and such buildings have been raised by the great and opulent in all ages, for the entertainment of their guests. This edifice, which was built by Wisdom, was supported by "seven pillars;" which I suppose to intimate, that it was constructed with perfect stability, and adorned with the perfection of beauty. And what is this banqueting-house, but the ordinances of divine grace, which are appointed altogether for the setting forth of this feast, and for the accommodation of all who attend upon it? In them there is room for all; and God will not fail, when they are attended as they ought to be, to manifest himself in the midst of them.

2. The feast, too, is prepared by Wisdom.

"The beasts," the sacrifices, "are killed;" and "the wine," for the purpose of rendering its flavor more exquisite, is "mingled." The entertainment is, in reality, a feast upon a sacrifice. And what is that sacrifice on which the whole world may feast, but the sacrifice of Christ, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world?" Precisely such a feast was the Passover, which Hezekiah kept unto the Lord. He kept it for the space of fourteen days; during which time not less than two thousand bullocks and seventeen thousand sheep were sacrificed, and all Judah were feasted, [2 Chronicles 30:22-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.22-26). But the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Passover, is sacrificed for all, and will afford an ample feast for all, not for a limited time only, but through the endless ages of eternity. As for the wine, which is so essential to a feast, what is that but the consolations of the Spirit, of which all shall partake who eat of this divine repast? For "Christ's body is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed, [John 6:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.55);" and in the ordinances of divine grace, both the one and the other are offered to every man. In fact, this is the very feast which the Prophet Isaiah spoke of as to be established under the Christian dispensation, "In this mountain shall the Lord Almighty make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6);" and in the ministration of the gospel is this now set forth more amply than if "all the beasts upon the mountains were slain for us, or the cattle upon a thousand hills."

Let me, then, without further delay, announce to you,

II. The invitation given.

For the preserving of the propriety of the parable, Wisdom, as a Queen, is said to "send forth her maidens." But Christ, whom wisdom represents, sends forth his ministers to call men to the feast.

The people invited are, "the simple, and those who lack understanding".

This, I grant, is a humiliating description; and it seems to designate the poor only and the ignorant. But, permit me to say, that it comprehends those also who stand the highest in their own estimation for wisdom and prudence. For who, in the whole universe, betray their folly more than those who "seek to fill their belly with the husks that the swine eat of, while in their Father's house they might find bread enough and to spare?" Yet this is the very state to which the learned, no less than the illiterate, reduce themselves, while seeking their happiness in the world rather than in God, and in the perishing vanities of time and sense rather than in the substantial blessings of eternity. I appeal to all of you, whether this be not the conduct of all by nature, and whether experience do not prove to all the folly of it? This is well represented in Scripture, as "filling our belly with the east wind, [Job 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.2);" and I ask of all, whether such conduct do not merit the imputation east upon it in my text? I ask, too, whether, to people of this character, the invitation be not most fitly sent? You cannot but confess, however successful you may have been in your pursuit of earthly objects, "in the fullness of your sufficiency you have been in straits, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)."

To you, then, is the invitation given.

To you, says Wisdom, "Come and eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled." Your past conduct has involved you in guilt and misery; both of which shall be removed by partaking of the feast provided for you. The sacrifice of Christ was expressly offered as an atonement for your sins; and if you partake of it in faith, your iniquities shall all be blotted out as a morning cloud. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood," says our blessed Lord, "has eternal life! [John 6:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.54);" yes, he has both a title to it, and the very beginning of it in his soul. As for "the wine that is mingled" for you, not all "the wine in Lebanon" can afford you such consolation and refreshment as the Holy Spirit will to those who receive his gracious communications.

But, of course, you must forsake those habits which you have hitherto indulged, and separate yourselves from those associates who would divert you from Wisdom's ways. For, "what fellowship can righteousness have with unrighteousness, or what communion can light have with darkness? There is a necessity for you to come out from the ungodly and be separate—if you would have God for your father, and enjoy the privilege of his sons and daughters, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18." The whole course of your life must be changed; you must not only "forsake the foolish," but "go also in the way of understanding," approving yourselves worthy disciples of our blessed Lord.

In fact, your whole taste must be changed; you cannot "savor the things of the flesh and of the Spirit" too, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5), "you cannot serve God and Mammon" too, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24); or "be the friends of the world and of Jehovah" too, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). If you come to the Gospel-feast, you must "desire only the things which are above, [Colossians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-2)," on which you shall "feast in the presence of your God forever and ever! [Matthew 26:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.29)."

APPLICATION.

Let me now address myself to you, my beloved brethren. I am sent as Wisdom's servant, as the minister of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with a message of mercy to every one of you. Let it not be offensive to you to be addressed under the character of those who are here invited. You surely will not deny, that you have sought your happiness in the world, rather than in God. Even though you were the greatest philosophers in the universe, this charge would be as applicable to you as to the lowest of mankind. And, if at this present moment you feel averse to range yourselves under the humiliating terms here accorded to you—then be assured the time is not far distant when you will designate yourselves by this name with bitter emphasis, and, contrasting yourselves with the Lord's guests, will exclaim, "We fools, counted their life madness, and their end to be without honor; but now they are numbered with the children of God, and their lot is among the saints! Therefore have we erred from the way of truth."

Let me entreat you now to humble yourselves before God, and to welcome, as especially suited to your state, the invitation which I now bring to you. But that I may be sure to address you in Wisdom's own words, I will adopt the language of an inspired prophet, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 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. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David! [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3)." You will find, at the close of the chapter from whence my text is taken, that folly also has her messengers: A foolish and abandoned woman will cry, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here; for stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knows not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of Hell! verse 13-18." Yes, these invitations are soon and widely followed; while the invitations of Wisdom are scornfully rejected. Truly this is greatly to be lamented; and bitter will be the consequences to those who persist in their folly. Accept the invitations that are gratifying to flesh and blood, and nothing but everlasting destruction awaits you; but accept that which now in Wisdom's name I deliver, and you shall "live;" "forsake the foolish, and live!"

Gladly would I prevail with you, my friends, before it is too late, and the door of her banqueting-house be shut against you. I have it in commission to "compel you to come in! [Luke 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.23)." O, resist me not, but let me by holy importunity prevail with you; so that the blessings of salvation may be yours, when the despisers of our message are wailing in everlasting darkness and despair.

#773

GOD'S CARE FOR THE RIGHTEOUS

**[Proverbs 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.3)**

"The Lord will not allow the soul of the righteous to famish."

God, who is the author and giver of all good, dispenses his blessings no less to the evil and unjust, than to the good and just. But he promises to those who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, that all other things shall be added unto them. To this effect he speaks also in the passage before us. But though this is the primary import of the text, we must not exclude its relation also to the concerns of the soul.

To elucidate this blessed promise, we shall show,

I. What reasons the righteous have to apprehend that their souls may famish.

A sense of weakness and of guilt may greatly discourage them; for,

1. The righteous cannot secure provisions for themselves.

The Word of God, and Christ in the Word—is the proper food of the soul; and, if a person can read, he need not be wholly destitute. But it is by the public ministration of the Word that God principally confirms the souls of his people. Now in many places where Christ should be preached, his name is scarcely heard; and, instead of children's bread, little is dispensed besides the husks of heathen morality. Even where some attention is paid to Christian doctrines, there is often much chaff mixed with the wheat; and "the trumpet that is blown, gives but an uncertain sound." Those therefore who by reason of distance, or infirmity, or other insurmountable obstacles, cannot have access to the purer fountains of truth, have great reason to fear that their souls will famish.

2. The righteous cannot, of themselves, feed upon the provisions set before them.

Where all the treasures of the Gospel are fully opened, it is God alone that can enrich any soul by means of them; even "Paul may plant, or Apollos may water, but it is God alone that can give the increase." The very same word is often made a peculiar blessing to one, that was altogether useless to another. God reserves the times and the seasons in his own hands; and "gives to every one as he will." When therefore the righteous hear of the effects wrought on others, and feel conscious that they themselves reaped no benefit from the Word, they are ready to fear that their souls will famish even in the midst of plenty.

3. The righteous well know that they deserve to be utterly abandoned by their God.

It is not only for their sins in general, that the righteous find occasion to humble themselves before God, but more particularly for their misimprovement of divine ordinances. Perhaps there is not any other more fruitful source of self-condemnation to the godly than this. When therefore they see how many opportunities of improvement they have lost, and how much guilt they have contracted by their deadness and formality in the worship of God—they are sensible that God may justly "remove their lampstand," and leave them to experience "a famine of the word."

But lest a dread of famishing should oppress the minds of the righteous, we shall proceed to show:

II. What grounds the righteous have to hope, that God will never allow such a melancholy event to happen.

However great the grounds of fear may be which the righteous feel within themselves, they have abundant reason to "encourage themselves in the Lord their God."

1. God has bountifully provided even for the ungodly.

The Gospel is "a feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well refined;" and God has "sent out into all the highways and hedges to invite the poor, the halt, the lame, and the blind," and has commissioned his servants to compel men, by dint of importunity, to accept his invitation. Now has he shown such concern for the wicked, and will he disregard the righteous? Will he not rather "cause the manna to fall around their tents," and "the water to follow them" through all this dreary wilderness? Yes, he would rather send a raven to feed them, or sustain them by a continued miracle, [1 Kings 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.6); 1 Kings 17:14, than ever suffer their souls to famish.

2. God is especially interested in the welfare of the righteous.

The righteous are God's "peculiar treasure above all people;" they are even "his sons and daughters." If they were left to perish, Jesus would lose the purchase of his blood, and the very members of his body. And can we imagine that God will be so unmindful of them as utterly to forsake them? Did he not on many occasions grant mercy to his chosen people for his own name sake, when their backslidings had rendered them fit objects of his everlasting displeasure? Thus then will he still be actuated by a regard for his own honor, and "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)."

3. God has pledged his Word that they shall never lack anything that is good for them.

"Exceeding numerous, great, and precious are the promises which God has given to his people." He "will supply all their needs, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus; he will give them grace and glory; and will withhold no good thing;" their souls "shall be even as a well-watered garden;" "bread shall be given them; and their water shall be sure." And will he violate his Word? he may leave his people in straits, as he did the Israelites of old; but it shall be only for the more signal manifestation of his love and mercy towards them. Let them only trust in him, and he "will never leave them, never, never forsake them [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5)."

We shall conclude with a word:

1. Of reproof.

It is certain that many do not "make their profiting to appear" as they ought. To such therefore we must say, "Why are you, being a king's son, lean from day to day, [2 Samuel 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 13.4)." Why are you crying continually, "Woe is me! my leanness! my leanness, [Isaiah 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 24.16)." When you should be "growing up as the calves of the stall, [Malachi 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.2)." Some part of the blame perhaps may attach to him who dispenses the ordinances among you, as lacking more life and spirituality in his ministrations; yet even this would be no excuse to you, since if your hearts were more spiritual, God would render your mean fare as nutritious as the richest dainties, [Daniel 1:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 1.12-15). If God should even "give you your desire—yet would he also send leanness into your souls, [Psalm 106:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.15)," while you continued to loath the heavenly manna. Learn then to come with a more eager appetite. Be more careful to digest the Word afterward by meditation and prayer; And look, not so much to the manner in which the Word is preached, as to Christ in the Word; since He is that bread of life which alone can nourish your souls; and which, if eaten by faith, will surely nourish them unto life eternal, [John 6:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.51).

2. Of consolation.

Some may put away from them this promise, under the idea that they are not of the character to whom it belongs. Now, though we would by no means encourage any to apply the promises to themselves in a presumptuous manner, and thereby to deceive their own souls with ungrounded expectations—yet we would not desire that any should refuse the consolation that properly belongs to them. Suppose then that any cannot absolutely number themselves among the righteous—yet, "if they hunger and thirst after righteousness, they are blessed, and shall be filled, [Matthew 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.6)." This is the Word of God to their souls; and we would have them expect assuredly its accomplishment in due season. Let them "desire the sincere milk of the word, and they shall grow thereby, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2)."

#774

EFFECTS OF SLOTH AND DILIGENCE COMPARED

**[Proverbs 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.4)**

"He who has a slack hand (that is, an idle or lazy hand) becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich."

It is certainly true, that men's circumstances in life depend on their own exertions, so far at least, as to justify the declaration in the text. Sometimes indeed God is pleased to raise men to opulence by labors not their own; and sometimes to withhold success from the industrious. But though this inequality is sometimes found in the dispensations of his Providence, we never see it in the dispensations of his grace. After the first communications of grace to the soul, men's progress or decay will always be proportioned to their own care and vigilance; the propositions in the text may be advanced without any exception:

I. Spiritual sloth will impoverish the soul.

There are many who work with "a slack hand".

This may be said of men when they improve not the means of spiritual advancement. God has appointed:  
Scripture reading, [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.16),  
and Scripture meditation, [Psalm 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.2),  
and prayer, [1 Thessalonians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.17),  
and self-examination, [Psalm 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.4); [Psalm 77:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.6) and [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)  
—as means of furthering the welfare of the soul. But, if we are remiss in these, we resemble a man who neglects to cultivate his fields; nor can it be expected that we should ever prosper in our spiritual concerns.

It may also be said of them, when feed the occasions of spiritual decay. God has mercifully guarded us against:  
the cares, [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22); [Matthew 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.21),  
the pleasures, [1 Timothy 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.6) and [2 Timothy 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.4),  
the company of the world, [2 Corinthians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-17);  
and against the indulgence of any secret sin, [Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.23). [Hebrews 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.12).

See the examples of Job, [Job 31:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.1). David, [Psalm 141:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 141.3); [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24). And it is of the utmost importance that we attend to these beneficial cautions. But if we are unmindful of them, we certainly show a very culpable remissness, and give advantage to our enemies to prevail against us.

Under such circumstances they will infallibly "become poor".

1. They will lose their joy and confidence.

People living in habitual spiritual watchfulness:  
are often full of the most lively joy, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8),  
and can look up to God as their Father, [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15),  
to Christ as their Savior, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20),  
and to Heaven as their home, [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1).

But these divine impressions are tender plants, which, if not duly watered, will soon wither and decay! [Galatians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.15).

2. They will also lose their spiritual health and strength.

There is a health of the soul, as well as of the body; and as the one cannot be maintained in strength but by proper food and exercise, so neither can the other. The graces of the soul, if not duly cultivated, will soon languish. The faith will become weak, the hope faint, the love cold; and whatever good "things remain in us, they will be ready to die." So poor will every one become, who deals with a slack hand.

While the soul is exposed to such evils from remissness, we are assured, on the contrary, that,

II. Spiritual diligence will enrich the soul.

Christian diligence comprehends far more than a mere attention to outward forms, however regular.

It imports a seasonable attention to all spiritual duties. There are some duties which, in comparison with others, are easy; but Christian diligence makes no distinction on this account; nor does it make the observance of some an excuse for neglecting others; but endeavors to do every work, whether public or private, civil or religious, in its season. [Psalm 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.3).

It includes also a conscientious improvement of all talents. Various are the talents committed unto men. Time, money, influence, together with every mental endowment, are among those which a Christian will feel himself more especially bound to improve. He considers them as given to him for the purpose of honoring God with them, and of rendering them subservient to the good of men. He therefore will not wrap any one of them in a napkin, but will so trade with them as to deliver them up with interest whenever he may be called to give up his account, [Matthew 25:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.15-18).

Such diligence will infallibly enrich the soul.

The exertion of our powers does not command success; but God invariably puts honor upon it, and makes it both the occasion and the means of communicating his blessings. Our diligence in cultivating the land cannot ensure the crop; yet it is by that, for the most part, that God replenishes our barns, and supplies our returning spiritual needs. Thus the diligent hand makes us rich:  
in grace,  
in peace,  
in holiness,  
and in glory.

"To him who has (that has improved his talent) shall more be given; and he shall have abundance." Every grace is improved by exercise, [Matthew 25:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.29), from that improvement arises a "peace which passes all understanding, [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17)," the whole man is thus progressively renewed after the divine image, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and an increased weight of glory is treasured up for the soul, when it shall receive its full reward, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17). 2 John, verse 8.

INFERENCES.

1. What a pitiable state are they in who never labor at all for the salvation of their souls!

If spiritual slackness alone will prove fatal, and that to people who were once diligent—then surely they must be poor indeed who have never entered on their work at all! Let the mirthful and thoughtless well consider this; for every man shall receive according to his own labor. Nor shall it be sufficient to say at the last day, "I did no harm;" the question will be, "What improvement did you make of your talent?" And if we have buried it in the earth, we shall be condemned as wicked and slothful servants.

2. What reason have all of us for humiliation and contrition!

If we consider the greatness of our work, and how little any of us have done in it—we shall find reason to blush and be confounded before God. Yes; while the world condemns us as "righteous overmuch," we should be condemning, and even loathing ourselves for doing so little.

What might we not have attained, if we had labored from the beginning with the same concern and diligence as others manifest in their temporal concerns? How low are the attainments of the best of us, not only in comparison with what they might have been, but of what we once expected they would be! Let us then trace our poverty to its proper cause, our own slackness; and "whatever our hand finds to do, let us henceforth do it with all our might."

#775

GOD'S BLESSING, THE GREATEST RICHES

**[Proverbs 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.22)**

"The blessing of the Lord makes rich; and he adds no sorrow with it."

Amidst the lessons of practical wisdom which we are taught in the Book of Proverbs, we find a continual reference to God as the source and the end of all.

If we attempt to spiritualize the different moral axioms, we in fact pervert them, and apply them to a use for which they were never intended.

If on the other hand, we regard them solely in a moral view, without any relation to God, we fall exceedingly short of their true import.

In explaining them, therefore, a proper medium must be observed; that we neither strain their meaning, on the one hand; nor enervate it, on the other.

To unfold to you the passage before us, I will show:

I. In what respects "the blessing of God" may be said to "make us rich".

This effect may well be ascribed to "the blessing of God,"

1. Because the blessing of God is in reality, the only source of all wealth.

Men are apt to ascribe their success in life to their own industry, and to the wisdom which they have exercised in the management of their affairs. But this is to rob God altogether of the glory due to him. The people of Israel were guarded against it by God, who particularly cautioned them not, when they should be established in Canaan, to arrogate anything to themselves; or to "say in their heart, My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth;" for that "it was God alone who had given them power to get wealth, [Deuteronomy 8:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.17-18)." We see how often men fail even in their best-concerted efforts! Success depends, in fact, on so many contingencies, which it is altogether beyond the power of man to control, that the wisest and most industrious of men must of necessity rely on God alone; even as the gardener, who, though he can plough and sow his land, can command neither the clouds to water it, nor the sun to fructify it with his invigorating rays.

No man therefore, however successful, should "Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food, [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.16);" but all must give glory to God alone:  
"who makes poor, or makes rich;  
and brings low, or lifts up;  
who raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit a throne of glory! [1 Samuel 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.7-8)."

2. Because the blessing of God is itself the greatest of all wealth.

What can be compared with the blessing of God upon the soul? If we succeed in life, it is that which constitutes our chief joy; or, if we fail in our earthly pursuits, it is that which will compensate for the loss of all.

The poorest man in the universe is rich, if he has the salvation of God in his soul. In the same way, the richest man in the universe is poor, miserably poor, if he is destitute of God's salvation. Behold Paul and Silas in prison, their feet fast bound in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges; and yet singing praises to God at midnight! Were they poor? No! They were rich, truly rich!

In the same way were the Hebrew youths, when, in the fiery furnace, the Lord Jesus Christ came and walked with them! [Daniel 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.25).

To the eye of faith, Lazarus was rich, though he subsisted only on the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. And had he been offered an exchange of condition with his opulent benefactor, he would have disdained the offer, and called himself incomparably the richer man!

So, in having God for our portion, we are truly rich. Paul, under such circumstances, accounted himself the richest man in the universe; and so he was; for, "though he had nothing—yet he possessed all things! [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)." And in like manner of us also, even though we are at this moment destitute of bread for the morrow, it may with truth be said, that "all things are ours, if we are Christ's! [1 Corinthians 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22-23)."

Thus, if we can say, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup, [Psalm 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.5)," we may account ourselves richer than those who have crowns and kingdoms at their command!

But we are especially informed by Solomon what is,

II. The peculiar happiness of the person so enriched.

With all other riches there is a mixture of sorrow to embitter them.

As for riches obtained by iniquity, the curse of God is upon them! [Jeremiah 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.11). [Habakkuk 2:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6-11). But where there has been nothing of rapacity or dishonesty in acquiring them—yet, if the blessing of God is not upon the soul, there is:  
much care in the preserving of them,  
much grief if they are lost, and  
little but disappointment and dissatisfaction in the use of them!

In truth, they are entitled to no better name than "vanity and vexation of spirit! [Ecclesiastes 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.26)."

Let the whole state of mankind be candidly surveyed, and it will be acknowledged that the most wealthy are far from being the happiest of men; for, partly from the tempers generated in their own bosoms, and partly from the collision into which they are continually brought with people envious, or proud, or dishonest, or in some way disobliging—it may well be doubted whether the pain occasioned by their wealth does not far exceed any pleasure which they derive from it. It was a wise petition which was offered by Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; but feed me with food necessary for me, [Proverbs 30:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.8)."

But there is another view, in which riches are far from affording any solid satisfaction; and that is, on account of the responsibility attached to them. They are talents to be improved for God; and, whether wasted in extravagance, or hidden in a napkin—they will bring down nothing but a curse in the day of judgment.

To those, on the other hand, who have wasted their money on personal gratifications, James says, "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter! [James 5:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.1-5)."  
  
But where God gives his blessing with wealth, "he adds no sorrow with it." There is then:  
no conscious guilt in the acquisition of it;  
no anxiety in the preservation;  
no disappointment in the use;  
no grief in the loss; and  
no dread of the responsibility attached to it!

On the contrary, "God has given to his people all things richly to enjoy, 1 Timothy 6:17;" and they have a rich enjoyment of everything, because they enjoy God in it. They receive it all as his gift; they taste his love in it.

They consider it, also, as a means of honoring God, and of doing good to man. A benevolent steward, who should be sent by his master to dispense his bounties to a famished multitude, would feel great delight in all the comfort which he was thus empowered to bestow; he would view his master as the author of the benefits, and himself only as the instrument; but his pleasure would still be exquisite, yes, and the more exquisite because his master was honored in all the good that was done. Such a steward the true Christian feels himself to be; and his final account, also, he contemplates with joy; assured that his stewardship shall be both approved and rewarded in that day.

From this subject I would take occasion to suggest two important lessons.

1. Learn in what spirit to address yourselves to every duty in life.

Do not be contented to perform a duty; but look for the blessing of God upon everything you do. Without his blessing you will have but little comfort in your own souls. I will not hesitate to say that in every duty whatever, from the highest to the lowest, the man who acts to God and for God will be the happiest man. Others, it is true, may exceed him in wealth; but he will have no reason to envy them; for they have sorrows which will not come near him, [Psalm 91:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.7); and he will have "a joy with which the stranger intermeddles not, [Proverbs 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.10)."

2. What to look for as your chief portion.

Earthly things are not to be neglected. Your worldly calling, whatever it may be, should be diligently followed. But the blessing of God should be the one object to which all others should be subordinated. Nothing, either on earth or in Heaven, should, in your estimation, bear any comparison with that, [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25).

If the question be put, "Who will show us any good?" your unvaried answer should be, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us! [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)." Then will you have "durable riches! [Proverbs 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.18)." And while those who seek any other portion will, "in the midst of their sufficiency, be in straits, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)," you, in whatever straits you are, will have a sufficiency for your support and comfort both in time and in eternity.

#776

PORTION OF THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS CONTRASTED

**[Proverbs 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.18)**

"The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward."

To a superficial observer the wicked appear to have a far better portion than the righteous; for it is certain, that, in respect of earthly things, the wicked have the larger share; while the righteous, whether poor or not in this world's goods, are objects of general hatred and contempt. But if we examine more attentively, we shall find that the advantage is decidedly and universally on the side of the righteous; for the wicked man, however prosperous he may be, "works a deceptive work," but to the righteous, however depressed he may be for a season, shall have a sure reward.

I. See the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, in their **characters**.

Though "the wicked" are not distinguished in this place by any appropriate description—yet they are sufficiently marked by standing in contrast with the righteous, whose characters are accurately defined. The one "sow righteousness," which the other neglect to sow.

1. Let us consider this distinction.

The sowing of righteousness imports that the person so engaged deliberately and with diligence, endeavors to fulfill the will of God; and that he does so with a view to a future harvest. The great "commandment" under the Gospel being, "that we believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23)"—he makes his first concern. The godly man comes to Christ daily as a self-ruined sinner, and looks to him as the appointed Savior of sinners. He seeks to be washed in Christ's blood from all his sins, and to be renewed by His Spirit after the Divine image. In a word, his daily consolation is, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength! [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

The aim of his soul is to "walk in all things just as Christ walked," and to cultivate altogether "the mind that was in Him," thus approving himself to God in the whole of his conduct, that in the last day that testimony may be given to him from the lips of his approving Judge, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

To the contrary, the wicked man has no such thoughts and no such desires. A saving interest in the Savior is not of any great importance in his eyes, because he feels no need of it; he concludes that he already possesses all that is requisite for his acceptance with God. As for "mortifying his earthly members," and "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts"—that is a work to which he is utterly averse! He rather studies to gratify himself, and to follow the bent of his own carnal inclinations. He may not indulge in gross sins; but his mind and life are altogether earthly. And whatever he may have of religion, it is a mere form, which does not engage his heart. Nor is genuine piety in any respect the delight of his soul.

In a word, the righteous man looks forward to a future harvest, and sows with a view to that. The wicked man looks no further than to this present world, and has all his desires bounded by the things of time and sense.

2. Let us see how far the above distinction is confirmed by the Word of God.

This is the very distinction which Paul himself makes between the carnal and the spiritual man, "Those who are after the flesh, mind the things of the flesh; and those who are after the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5)." The one "seeks his own things, and not the things that are Jesus Christ, [Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.21);" the other "lives not unto himself, but unto Him who died for him and rose again, [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8)."

It is here particularly to be noticed, that the Scriptures do not make the main distinction of the righteous and the wicked, to consist in outward acts—but in the inward habit of the mind. The wicked is not necessarily distinguished by open irregularities; but he makes self the end, and aim, and object of his life; while "the righteous lives altogether for, and to, his God."

A similar difference will be found between them,

II. See the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, in their **end**.

The wicked man follows a mere shadow, which eludes his grasp.

He seeks for happiness, and hopes to find it in the path which he has marked out for himself. But "he works a deceptive work," which invariably disappoints his hopes. Whatever be the gratification afforded him, it is transient, and brings no solid satisfaction with it. Whether his pursuit be more sensual, or more refined—it still leaves an aching void in the bosom, which the world can never fill! Solomon tried everything that was within the reach of mortal man, intellectual as well as sensual; and, after a full experience of it all, declared it all to be "vanity and vexation of spirit." And if there is a man in the universe who is able from experience to give any other testimony respecting it, we will be content that that man shall walk in his own ways, and not in the ways of God. But we have no fear that this concession will be productive of any evil; for there is not a man in the whole world that will presume to avail himself of it, since there is no man whose conscience does not tell him that the creature altogether is a broken cistern, and that no true happiness can be found apart from Christ the fountain of living waters.

On the contrary the righteous have a sure reward.

The seed he sows may lie a long time under the clods, and may seem as if it were buried forever; but it shall spring up in due season, and bring with it a harvest of solid joy. The Scripture attests, that "the work of righteousness is peace, [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17)," and that "in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward, [Psalm 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.11)."

And so it is invariably found. This "reward is sure" on two accounts; one is, that his success is independent of all casualties; and the other is, that it is secured to him by the promise of God himself. Happiness as arising from earthly things may be altogether destroyed by disease or accident, or pains either of body or mind; but spiritual happiness is independent of all these things, and often derives a zest from those very things which seem most calculated to subvert it.

If we look to a future state, where the wicked, notwithstanding all their neglect of heavenly things, hope to have a portion with the righteous—then we shall see the text fulfilled in all its extent.

What surprise and anguish will seize hold upon the wicked the very instant he opens his eyes in the eternal world! Conceive of "the Rich Man" summoned from his carnal indulgences into the presence of his God; how little did he imagine but a few days before in what such a life would issue! [Luke 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.23). How deceitful had his work been, and how delusive all his hopes!

But the righteous is sure to find his hopes realized, and his highest expectations infinitely exceeded; for God's express determination is, that "whatever any man sows, that shall he also reap; he who sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he who sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

See then,

1. The wisdom of true piety.

Wisdom consists in pursuing the best ends by the fittest means. Now I would ask: What end is to be compared with eternal life? And by what other means can it be sought, than by those mentioned in the text? Let me then entreat you to "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time;" for now is the seed time; and you will to all eternity reap according to what you sow! "If you sow iniquity, you will reap vanity! [Job 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.8). [Proverbs 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.8)." "If you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind! [Hosea 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 8.7)." But if you "plow up your fallow ground, and sow in righteousness, you shall reap in mercy," both in this world and the world to come! [Hosea 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.12).

Let me however add, that you must not be sparing of your seed; for, "if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly; but if you sow bountifully, you shall reap also bountifully!! [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6)."

2. The folly of neglecting the immortal soul.

Men will deride piety, because it is cultivated by few; and applaud worldliness, because its advocates are many. But the broad road is not at all the safer, simply because it is trodden by so many, nor the narrow way the less safe because it is trodden by so few. Each path will have its proper termination, and issue in the state that God has assigned to it! [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14).

Can anything then be conceived more foolish, than to put our eternal happiness on such an issue, that it cannot possibly be attained but at the expense of God's veracity? Truly if such conduct were pursued in reference to this world, it would be accounted not only folly, but madness itself! It is represented by Solomon as a "laying in wait for our own blood, and lurking privily for our own lives! [Proverbs 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.18)," yes, and as a "being in love with death itself! [Proverbs 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.36). Let me then urge all of you now to seek "the one thing needful;" and let me encourage you to it by this consideration, that, "if you sow in tears, you shall reap in joy; and if you now go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed—you shall surely come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you! [Psalm 126:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5-6)."

#777

CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY ENCOURAGED

**[Proverbs 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.25)**

"A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

If only we are careful to divest our statements of everything which carries with it the idea of merit, it is scarcely possible to speak too strongly in praise of generosity, as lovely in itself, and as acceptable to God. To speak of generosity as contributing in any degree to justify the soul before God, would surely be a fatal error! But as rewardable, and certain to be rewarded both in this life and the life to come, we ought to speak of generosity; and the squeamish jealousy which is entertained on this head, and which fears to declare all that God's blessed Word contains upon the subject, is, in my apprehension, extremely erroneous and unfitting.

The words which I have just read will lead me to show you:

I. The spirit we should possess.

In my text we see a spirit of generosity, and a spirit of benevolence; the one constituting an internal principle in the soul, the other displaying itself in active exertions towards all within our sphere. Let me call your attention, then, to,

1. A spirit of **generosity**.

The generous hand is good; but the generous soul is far better; and this it is which every Christian should possess. We should consider all that we have as so many talents committed to us by our heavenly Master, to be improved for him. Our time, our property, our influence, should all be considered God's; and nothing as really ours, but the honor and happiness of employing all for God.

We can easily conceive what the feelings of an angel would be, if he were sent from Heaven to dispense blessings of any kind; there would be no grudging of his time and labor, nor would there be any pride and self-delight in his mind on account of his fidelity in the execution of his office. He would consider himself simply as God's servant; and find all his delight in doing the will of Him who sent him, and in being instrumental to the welfare of mankind.

If this appears to be too strong of an illustration, I must say, Instead of being too strong, it falls far short of the example which our blessed Lord has set before us, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich—yet for your sakes became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)." This is the true standard at which we should aim; even such a delight in advancing the welfare of others, as disposes us to encounter whatever self-denial may be requisite for the attainment of our end. This may properly be called "a generous soul."

2. A spirit of **benevolence**.

Godly principles in the heart always manifest themselves by actions in the life. To "refresh others" should be the employment of us all. In one sense, the whole world is the garden of the Lord. All of us are his plants; and all of us his gardeners, who should be occupied in watering the plants around us. Whether our capacity for exertion is greater or less, we should endeavor to improve it for God and man. If we have but one talent, we should not hide it in a napkin, but employ it for the Lord. We should consider what it is that every plant around us needs, in order that we may minister, as far as we are able, to its necessities. Does any need instruction, or comfort, or temporal relief? We should adapt our labors to his necessities, and look to God for his blessing on our endeavors. Day by day the earthly gardener is so occupied; and it is an employment in which we should daily engage, and of which we never should be weary. At the close of every day we should have the same testimony from conscience as holy Job enjoyed, "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, [Job 29:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.11-16)."

Such being the proper spirit of a Christian, let us consider,

II. The benefits that will accrue to the possessor of it.

However great may be the good which a person of this spirit may do, I hesitate not to say, that he will receive far greater benefits than he imparts! He will receive them,

1. From the very exercise of the principle itself.

The high-priest within the veil, while offering incense before his God, was regaled with the fragrances of his own offering; a privilege which no other individual was permitted to enjoy. In the same way, the person who exercises love will derive from that very employment a blessedness of which no one else can form any just conception. Well is it said, in a foregoing verse of this chapter, "A merciful man does good to his own soul! verse 17." The exercise of liberality and benevolence tends exceedingly to the suppression of evil in the soul, and to the cultivation and establishment of every holy disposition. Mark the contrast which it drawn in [1 Timothy 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.10-11). And is it not a sweet evidence to the soul, that God has wrought a good work within it? No doubt it is; for if we "love not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth," then we may, from that very circumstance, "know that we are of the truth, and may assure our hearts before God, [1 John 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-19)."

Indeed this is no small part of the recompense which God will bestow on those who serve him with fidelity; he would even consider himself as unrighteous and unjust if he did not thus remember our work and labor of love, which we have showed toward his name in ministering to his saints!" On this very ground the Apostle says, "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence unto the full assurance of hope unto the end, [Hebrews 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10-11)."

2. From the immediate agency of Almighty God.

God has said, that "what we give to the poor, we lend unto God, and he will repay it again, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17)." And this he will do both in this life and in the life to come. Very remarkable is his promise in relation to the present life, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you! [Luke 6:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.38)."

In a spiritual view, more especially, will God recompense his faithful people. Hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah, which remarkably accord with the expressions of our text, "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail! [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11)."

Nor shall our labors of love be forgotten by Him in the eternal world. He holds forth this as an encouragement to us to exert ourselves in all the offices of love, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life! [1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19)."

And that no doubt may remain on this head, he tells us expressly, that such people shall "be recompensed at the resurrection of the just;" and that to those who have administered to the relief of the poor and the distressed, he will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" Thus freely and thus richly shall "he who waters be watered also himself;" yes, as the prophet says, "with showers of blessings, shall he be blessed! [Ezekiel 34:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.26).

We may clearly see from hence,

1. From whence proceeds that leanness, of which so many complain.

Many complain, that, notwithstanding the Gospel is so rich in its blessings, they are not happy. But I believe it will be generally found, that those who complain thus, live only for themselves. I think it almost impossible that they who live for God and for their fellow-creatures, should not be happy. Such circumstances as Job's may exist, but they are rare; and even he himself endured them but for a time. Examine, then, your state as before God, and see whether you possess the dispositions of which my text speaks; for, if you do not, how is it possible that you should have any blessing from the Lord? Hear what Job would have thought of such a state as yours, "If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless-- but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow--if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint! [Job 31:16-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.16-22)." What you sow, you must expect to reap; and if you "sow but sparingly," in the way of love and mercy, "you shall reap but sparingly" of those blessings which the God of love and mercy will bestow!

2. What encouragement we have to proceed in the work before us.

The charity which I would propose to your support is worthy of all the aid which you can afford to give it. And for your encouragement, I will appeal to all: Who among you ever abounded in liberality, without finding it a source of joy? Or who ever watered others, without being himself watered by the Lord? I urge all of the above, because "I desire fruit that may abound to your account! [Philippians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.17)."

#778

THE WISDOM OF WINNING SOULS

**[Proverbs 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.30)**

"He who wins souls is wise!"

Genuine piety is operative and influential on the whole life. It manifests itself very principally in labors of love to those around us. "The fruit of the righteous" is very fitly compared to "a tree of life," which administers to the welfare of all who come under its kindly shade. True, indeed, such people are often regarded only as weak enthusiasts; and are despised in proportion as they exert themselves for the benefit of their fellow-creatures. But they have a good report from God himself, who says concerning them, "He who wins souls is wise!"

This sentence it shall be my endeavor to confirm; and confirmed it will be beyond all doubt, if we consider what may be justly said in vindication of every one who engages in this good work.

I. The **object** that a winner of souls proposes is most excellent.

What in the universe is there worthy to be compared with an immortal soul? And what work can be compared with that which is done for the soul, in its conversion to God?

Think of its being plucked as a brand out of the fire of Hell itself!

Think of its being restored to the favor of its offended God!

Think of its being transformed into the divine image!

Think of its being exalted to a participation of all the glory and felicity of Heaven!

Is there any object that can stand in competition with this? What is the acquisition of crowns and kingdoms in comparison with this?

II. The **labor** that a winner of souls bestows, is most beneficial:

1. To the soul he wins.

Let the foregoing hints be duly contemplated; and then say what a benefactor he is. "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins! [James 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.19-20)."

2. To the world around him.

Man, in his unconverted state, is a snare to all around him. By his example at least, if not by any avowed declarations, he teaches men to think that the concerns of this world are most worthy of their attention, and that the concerns of the soul are only of secondary importance. But, when once he is truly turned to God, the honor of God is dear unto him, and the welfare of immortal souls lies near his heart. For the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom he prays in secret, and labors according to his ability in the sphere wherein he moves. "May your kingdom come," is the language, not of his lips only, but of his heart also. He now lives, not for himself, as hitherto, but for God, for his Savior, for his fellow-men; and whatever he possesses he considers as a talent to be improved for them. Now, therefore, he becomes "a light in the world;" and, from being an agent of Satan to advance the kingdom of darkness, he is a favored instrument of Jehovah, to promote in every way the happiness and salvation of the human race. Who can calculate the benefits accruing from such a change?

3. To himself also.

Who ever labored for God without receiving in his own soul a rich reward? [Psalm 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.11)." "Who ever watered others, and was not himself watered by the Lord? verse 25." The very graces which a man exercises in winning souls to God, diffuse a sweet serenity, a holy joy, over the whole man, and assimilate him to his Lord and Savior, and render him fit for the inheritance that is reserved for him. I may add also, his very labor augments for him the weight of glory that is reserved for him in Heaven; for God has said, in reference to this very thing, that "every man shall receive according to his own labor, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8);" and that "those who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars, forever and ever! [Daniel 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.3)."

Is not he "wise," then, who engages in such a work as this?

In addition to all this I must say,

III. The **end** of a winner of souls is most glorious.

This is the end which God the Father had in view, when he delegated to his Son the office of redeeming man. This was the end for which our adorable Savior "left the bosom of the Father," and assumed into union with himself our fallen nature, and led a life of sorrow upon earth, and at last died for us upon the cross. To this he looked forward, as "the joy that was set before him, for which he endured the cross and despised the shame! [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." And when he beholds this as the fruit of his sufferings, he is altogether "satisfied with the travail of his soul, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11)."

The Holy Spirit also regards this as the end for which he performs his part in the economy of redemption. For what does he "strive with rebellious man? [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3)." For what end does he enlighten, quicken, sanctify the souls of men, or refresh and invigorate them with his heavenly consolations? All of this is to "glorify Christ, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14)," in the salvation of man. In truth, the salvation of sinful men is the work that every person of the Godhead will be glorified to all eternity. What is it that illustrates in harmonious union all the attributes of God? What is it that is the one subject of praise and adoration among all the heavenly hosts? Is not this the song of all that have been redeemed? "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto our God, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)." Even the angels that never sinned, add their "Amen to this; and sing their praises unto God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever! [Revelation 5:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-13)."

Compare with this work, "all the labor that is done under the sun," and it is no better than laborious folly. Not he who accumulates to himself wealth or honor, but "he who wins souls, is wise."

What, in **conclusion**, shall I say?

1. Let every one **seek the salvation of his own soul**.

Is it wisdom to win the souls of others? What folly, then, must it be to lose our own? In this labor we have more abundant encouragement. We may seek to save others, and fail in our attempt; but who ever failed, who sought salvation for his own soul? Find, in the annals of the whole world, one who ever looked to Christ in vain? Who ever washed in the fountain of his blood in vain? or for whom did the grace of Christ ever prove inadequate and insufficient?

Let the world deride this labor as folly, if they please; they will soon see who it is that is really wise; and will soon condemn themselves, more bitterly than now the most envenomed among them condemn the righteous, "We fools accounted their life madness, and their end to be without honor; but now we see how greatly we have erred from the way of truth." Who then is wise among you, let him "give himself wholly" to the concerns of his soul; for "the wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools! [Proverbs 3:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.35)."

2. Let every one also **seek the salvation of others**.

There are many ways in which this may be done, such as:  
The ministry of the gospel.  
The visiting of the sick.  
The instructing of children.  
The sending forth of the holy Scriptures.  
The support of missions, etc. etc.

In particular, let every one attend to his own household. For these, in a more especial manner, is every one responsible. But in whatever way our exertions are called forth, let us remember that they must be used in a wise, discreet, affectionate manner. We must surely declare the whole counsel of God; but, if we would succeed in our labors, we must endeavor to "win souls" by love, and not drive them away by severity and terror.

#779

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

**[Proverbs 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.26)**

"The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor!"

Men in their external appearance are alike; so far at least, that their moral character cannot with any accuracy be determined by it. But God, who searches the heart, sees an immense difference between different men; such a difference as suffices to arrange them all under two great classes:  
the righteous,  
the wicked.

In the righteous, God finds an excellency which he in vain looks for in others; and to point out this superior excellency is my object, in this discourse.

But here it is proper to observe that Solomon does not draw the comparison between a righteous and a notoriously wicked man; but between a righteous man and "his neighbor," however excellent that neighbor may be; for, if there is in any man a lack of positive and inherent righteousness—then whatever else he may possess, he must be classed with the wicked; and with such only will my present comparison be instituted.

I. The righteous man is more excellent than his neighbor, in his **connections**.

A truly righteous man is **born of God**.

This is frequently and fully declared in the Holy Scriptures, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12); [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5) and [1 John 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.1); and though he is the poorest man upon earth, he is entitled to address his God under the endearing name of Father.

A truly righteous man is **united to Christ**.

He is united to Christ:  
as a building to the foundation, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5);  
as a wife to her husband, [Ephesians 5:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.32). [Revelation 21:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.9);  
as a branch to the vine, [John 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1);  
as a member to the body, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30).

There is no other union so close and intimate, except that which exists between God the Father and the Lord Jesus, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21); [John 17:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.23). For he is not only one body with him, but one spirit also, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17); for Christ lives in him, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20), and is his very life! [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4).

The **Holy Spirit dwells** in a truly righteous man.

He is a temple of the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19), who abides in him more manifestly and more effectually than in the whole universe besides; and so desirable a residence is his heart accounted by the Holy Spirit, that, in comparison with it, the temple of Solomon itself was held in utter contempt! [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1-2).

A truly righteous man is of the **same family with all the glorified saints and angels**.

There is but one family, whether in Heaven or earth, of which Christ is the head, [Ephesians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.15); and there is not an angel before the throne that does not account it an honor to wait upon him, and to minister unto him! [Hebrews 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.14).

What does any WORLDLY MAN possess, that can be compared with this?

Whose child is he? "A child of the wicked one! [Matthew 13:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.38). [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10);" as our Lord has said, "You are of your father the devil! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)."

In the last day the holy angels will minister to the ungodly also; but it will only be to "gather them together" from every part of the universe, and to "bind them up in bundles," and to cast them headlong into the fire of Hell! [Matthew 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.30). Tell me, then, to which of these the superior excellency belongs?

II. The righteous man is more excellent than his neighbor, in his **principles**.

**The righteous man** is altogether under the influence of faith in Christ, and love to God and others.

He looks for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has no hope whatever, but in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. As for any righteousness of his own, he utterly disclaims it. He knows, that if he were judged by the best act he ever performed, he must forever perish! The way which God himself has provided for the salvation of sinners is that which he desires, and in which he glories; the language of his inmost soul is this, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world! [Galatians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.11)."

At the same time that he looks thus to be saved as a sinner, he labors to walk as a saint, and to "adorn the doctrine of God his Savior in all things." Nor is he impelled to this by any slavish fear of punishment. No! "the love of Christ constrains him; because he thus judges, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again! [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15)." And as he serves his God from love, so is he actuated by the same principle in all his fellowship with men, "he walks in love, as Christ has loved him! [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2);" and he looks upon this as the best fruit of his faith, [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6), and as the surest evidence of his acceptance with God, 1 [John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14); [1 John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.19); [1 John 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.7); [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.17).

How widely different from these are the principles of **the wicked man**!

Let it be remembered, that I am not only speaking of those who indulge in gross wickedness, but of all whom are not truly saved. Whatever they may possess in respect of outward morality, they are strangers to the true exercise both of faith and love. They do not fully enter into the great mystery of redemption; they feel not their need of such a Savior as God has provided for them. That God himself should become a man, and die under the load of their sins, and work out a righteousness wherein they may stand accepted before hi—they see no occasion for all this; they think they might be saved on easier terms; or, if I may so express it, at a cheaper rate.

They cannot see why they should have so inestimable a price paid for them, when their own repentance and reformation might have well sufficed for all the demands which God had upon them.

Nor do they feel their need of the Holy Spirit to teach and sanctify them, when their own wisdom and strength were, upon the whole, adequate to their necessities.

At all events, if they assent to the Gospel salvation as true, they do not embrace it with their whole hearts, and rejoice in it as that which alone could give them a saving hope before God.

So also in their obedience, all which they do is from constraint, rather than from love; as clearly appears from hence, that they are satisfied, upon the whole, with what they do; whereas, if they felt their obligations to God for the gift of his only Son to die for them, and of his Holy Spirit to renew them—then they would feel nothing but dissatisfaction and grief on account of their short-comings and sins. In fact, all their works are done merely in conformity with the customs of the world, and for the purpose of forming a ground for self-estimation, and for the estimation of those around them.

What comparison, then, will these bear with the characters with which they are here contrasted? They are as inferior to the righteous "as dross is inferior to the purest gold, [Jeremiah 6:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.30)."

III. The righteous man is more excellent than his neighbor, in his **habits**.

**The righteous man** primarily lives unto his God.

See him from day to day; his whole soul is humbled before God, under a sense of his own extreme unworthiness. Were you to behold him in his secret chamber, you would behold him more abased before his God for an evil thought or desire, than an ungodly man would be for the actual commission of the grossest sin. Oh! the sighs and groans which he involuntarily utters, under the load of that burden—that body of sin and death, from which he cannot get free! And many are the tears which he sheds in secret, because he cannot attain that perfect holiness which his soul pants after!

With his humiliation he breathes forth in most devout accents his prayers and praise. His prayers are no formal service, but a holy wrestling with God; and his praises resemble those of Heaven, that are accompanied with the most devout prostration of soul.

A life of self-denial, too, characterizes his daily walk. He desires to "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and it is his incessant labor to "mortify the whole body of sin." "Not a right hand, or right eye," would he willingly retain; he would gladly part with everything, however dear to him, if only he may but enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, and approve himself faithful to the heart-searching God.

To prepare for death and judgment is his primary concern. He lives as on the borders of eternity. He knows not at what hour the bridegroom may arrive; and therefore he keeps his lamp trimmed, that he may be ready to enter into the bride-chamber with his beloved Lord!

But how is it with **the wicked** in these respects?

Are they from day to day humbling themselves in the Divine presence? Whatever cares and sorrows they have, are altogether of a worldly nature. To "abhor themselves," like Job, and "to repent in dust and ashes," unless for some wickedness that has exposed them to public hatred and contempt, is no part of their experience before God.

And what are their prayers and thanksgivings? Nothing but a mere lip-service, in which their hearts are not at all engaged.

As for self-denial, they know little about it. Their whole life is a system of self-indulgence. They may not run into gross sins on account of their regard for their character among men; but they pursue with unabated ardor those earthly vanities on which their hearts are set. Pleasure, or riches, or honor, occupy all their thoughts, and stimulate all their exertions. They live altogether for themselves, and not for God; for the body, and not for the soul; for time, and not for eternity.

Surely the further we compare their characters, the more will the superiority of the righteous appear.

It remains that we yet further contemplate the righteous,

4. It remains that we yet further to contemplate the righteous man in his **final end**.

How blessed this will be, no words can adequately describe!

Were you present with him in his dying hour, and God were to open your eyes, you would see angels attendant on him, to bear upon their wings his departing spirit into Abraham's bosom. Could you follow him, and witness his reception by the Most High God, what plaudits would you hear! "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord!" How would you, then, behold him graced with a crown of gold, seated upon a throne, invested with a kingdom, and shining forth with a glory that would eclipse the noon-day sun! To all eternity will he then live, in the immediate fruition of his God, as holy as God himself is holy; and as happy, according to his capacity, as God himself is happy.

Alas! alas! Here all comparison must forever cease.

The wicked, unhappy creatures! are dragged into the presence of an angry God, in vain "calling upon rocks and mountains to cover them from his wrath!" From him they hear that dreadful sentence, "Depart you who are cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" and into that fire are they cast, even "that lake that burns with fire and brimstone," from, whence "the smoke of their torment will ascend forever and ever!"

But this is too painful to reflect upon. O that the very mention of it may suffice to confirm the assertion in my text, and to convince you all wherein true excellency can be found!

ADDRESS.

1. To those whom God has classed with "the wicked".

You will find, in the words following my text, that the people contrasted with the righteous are so designated; and of them it is said, "The way of the wicked seduces them." Now, it must be granted, that "their way" is more easy, and to flesh and blood more pleasant, and more approved by an ungodly world; and, therefore they imagine it to be, on the whole, preferable to the difficult and self-denying and despised path of the righteous.

But they are "seduced" by these subtle appearances; and "a deceived heart has turned them aside; so that they cannot deliver their soul, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)."

But be dispassionate, and judge as before the Lord. If you deceive yourselves, you cannot deceive Him. He will judge, not according to your own erroneous estimate of yourselves, but according to truth, and to the real state of your souls.

Yet methinks you cannot deceive even yourselves, if you will but reflect with any degree of candor upon the comparison that has been set before you. In truth, you have in your own bosoms a witness for God; for, whether your conduct is more or less moral, there is not one of you that does not say in his heart, especially in his more thoughtful moments, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

2. To those who are disposed to number themselves among "the righteous".

Many who claim this distinction prove themselves, by their habits, most unworthy of it. It is a melancholy truth, that many professors of religion, instead of being more excellent than their neighbor, are inferior to him in almost everything that is amiable and praiseworthy. Such self-deceivers will have a fearful account to give at the last day.

To every one, then, among you I would say, If you profess yourselves to be righteous, let it appear to all around that you are so by the superior excellence of your lives. Our Lord says to his disciples, "What do you do more than others?" More than others you ought to do; inasmuch as your obligations and assistances are more than others are acquainted with. You are to "shine as lights in a dark world;" and in every relation of life to approve yourselves more excellent than your neighbor. You husbands or wives, parents or children, masters or servants— you should fill up your station in life more to the honor of God and the spiritual good of others around you.

I conclude, then, with that direction which our blessed Lord has given you, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven!"

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THE CHARACTER AND END OF THE WICKED

**[Proverbs 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.5)**

"A wicked man is loathsome, and comes to shame!"

The world in general uphold and favor one another in their evil ways; some will even "make a mock at sin," and glory in it. But God's testimony respecting the wicked man is, that, whatever his rank, or talents, or estimation among men are, he is indeed "loathsome, and comes to shame."

In these words we behold,

I. The **character** of the wicked.

The wicked include all who are not righteous.

There are but two classes of people mentioned in the Scriptures; and to one or other of them we all belong. There is no intermediate character. We indeed cannot always determine to which of these classes men belong, because we cannot discern the heart; but God, to whom all things are open and exposed, will distinguish them from each other as easily as we do sheep from the goats.

It is of infinite importance that we should have this truth impressed on our minds; for we are ready to rank among the wicked those only who are guilty of heinous crimes; whereas all are wicked who are not truly righteous; all, who are not converted to God, and renewed in the spirit of their minds.

God's testimony respecting them is applicable to them all, whether they be more or less wicked in respect of gross sins.

The openly profane are surely exceeding loathsome in the sight of God.

Let anyone but notice their conversation; how replete is it with lewdness and blasphemy!

Let their tempers be marked; what evil dispositions do they manifest on all occasions!

Let their conduct be scrutinized, their drunkenness, their whoredoms, and all their other abominations  
—and who must not confess the justice of that representation, which compares them to swine wallowing in the mire, and dogs devouring their own vomit! [2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.22). See also [Job 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.16). [Psalm 53:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 53.1-3).

The more decent, it is true, are not so vile in the eyes of men, (yes, perhaps they are honored and esteemed) but they also are loathsome in the sight of God. What monsters of ingratitude are the very best of unregenerate men! What inconceivable mercies have they received from God; and yet they have never spent one hour in humble and grateful adorations. If they had labored thus to win the affections of some worthless wretch, and after many years of unintermitted kindness were requited by him as they requite God, would they not consider him as deserving of utter detestation? How loathsome then must they be, whose obligations are infinitely greater, and whose conduct is inexpressibly more vile!

Their actions, it is confessed, may have been fair and subtle; but what have their hearts been? Have they not been a very sink of iniquity? [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9). [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5). Yes, so depraved are the very best of men, that there are few, if any, who would not rather die, than have all the secrets of their hearts known to men as they are known to God. What then are such people, but white-washed sepulchers, [Matthew 23:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.27). No wonder that, however they are esteemed among men, both their persons and their services are an abomination to the Lord! [Luke 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.16). [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8); [Proverbs 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.26); [Proverbs 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.9).

Conformable to their character must surely be,

II. The **end** of the wicked.

1. Sin is in itself inconceivably vile, and will bring its votaries to shame **in this world**.

How often are the fairest characters blasted by detection, and exposed to infamy! The deeds of darkness, when brought to light, often reflect such dishonor upon men, as to make them shun society, and put an end to their own existence by suicide! And how many are brought to die by the hands of a public executioner, and to entail disgrace on their posterity! Little do men think, when first they yield to temptation, where sin will lead them. It is a principal device of Satan to conceal the consequences of sin, and to make men believe that they can recede from it whenever they please; but when he has once entangled their feet—they find to their cost that they cannot escape from his net!

2. Sin is in itself inconceivably vile, and will bring its votaries to shame **in the world to come**.

There are many who pass honorably through life, and, for their conduct in society, deserve every token of our respect. But God will try the hearts of men in the last day; and "will bring to light every secret thing, whether it is good or evil." Then what shame will overwhelm the most subtle moralist, whose heart was unrenewed by grace!

A lack of love to Christ now is thought but a light matter; but then it will appear in its true colors, as deserving of God's heaviest indignation! 1 Corinthians 16:22.

Secret lusts too, are overlooked, as though they did not at all defile the soul; but they will then be found to have made us altogether loathsome and odious to God! [Ezekiel 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.4); [Ezekiel 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.7).

Then will Christ, [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23) with all his saints, [1 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.2). and angels, [Matthew 13:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.41-42). unite in expressing their abhorrence of these white-washed sepulchers; so fully shall that declaration be verified, They shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2).

We cannot improve this subject better than by pointing out,

1. What is that repentance which such people need.

It is by no means sufficient to confess that we are sinners; we should feel that we are indeed loathsome, [Isaiah 64:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.6); and should be filled with shame on account of the extreme vileness of our hearts, [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31); [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63) and [Romans 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.21). Nothing less than this will constitute that "repentance which is not to be repented of. See [Ezra 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.6). [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

2. How their character and end may be completely changed.

As loathsome as we are, we may be purified by the blood of Jesus, and be made without spot or blemish in the sight of God, [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27). Our natures also may be changed by his Spirit, so that we shall possess a beauty that God himself shall admire, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4). Yes, instead of having shame for our portion, we shall be made to inherit "glory and honor and immortality." We shall be sons of the living God, and be seated with Christ on thrones of glory! Let us then seek this change, and rely on God's promises, that by means of them it may be accomplished in us [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1).

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THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS HARD

**[Proverbs 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.15)**

"The way of transgressors is hard!"

The Scriptures abound with weighty aphorisms which deserve the deepest consideration. For the most part, they will be found directly opposed to the general opinions of mankind. The maxims of men are too often founded on the appearance of things, and on the respect they bear to our temporal advantage; but the declarations of God exhibit things as they really are, and as they will prove themselves to be, if we take into consideration their aspect on eternity.

The transgressors of God's law account themselves happy in having cast off his yoke, and freed themselves from the restraints which his law would impose upon them. But the truth is that he is under a most desperate delusion, and grievously deceives his own soul. "A good understanding," regulating the conduct agreeably to God's commands "will ensure to a man favor" and comfort, both in this world and the next;" "but the way of transgressors is hard."

I. The lost sinner's whole life is a state of **bondage**.

Whatever the besetting sin of the ungodly is, it has within them the force of a law, to which alas! they yield a willing obedience, [Romans 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.21)." As the ten tribes "ran willingly after the commandment" of Jeroboam to the commission of idolatry, to which they had an inward and almost invincible propensity, [Hosea 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.11); so do the worldling, the sensualist, the drunkard, follow but too readily, the impulse of their own corrupt hearts! A spring will not more naturally rise, when the power which compressed it is removed, than their lusts will rise to demand their usual gratification, when an opportunity for indulgence is afforded them. The poor infatuated agents will call this liberty, 2 Peter 2:19; but the whole Scriptures designate it bondage, "Don't you know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves—then you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16)." Yes, in yielding to temptation we are "the slaves of sin, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17);" and the slaves of Satan also; for "he it is who works in all the children of disobedience, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)," and leads them captive at his will, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)." In fact, the whole Gospel takes this for granted; for Christ was sent on purpose to redeem us from this bondage, [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18), and to "make us free indeed! [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36)."

But while thus enslaved, are we not in a most pitiable condition? True, we may not be sensible of the bondage, because the service of sin and Satan is in accordance with our own corrupt inclinations. We are, in fact, the more to be pitied, because of our insensibility; even as a maniac is, whose whole life is occupied in things which tend to the destruction of his own welfare!

II. The lost sinner's whole life is a state of **disquietude**.

The ungodly man, whatever be his pursuit, finds nothing in which his soul can rest. Possess what he may, "in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)." There is always a secret something unpossessed; some object which he thinks would make him happy, but which, even when in appearance almost attained, eludes his grasp; and after he has "hewn out to himself a cistern with great labor, he finds it only a broken cistern that can hold no water, [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13)." His continual disappointments fill him with vexation; so that he finds even the objects of his fondest hope prove, in the outcome, to be "vanity and vexation of spirit!"

Not being devoted to God, he lacks those enjoyments and those prospects which alone can afford consolation to him under his trials; To his other pains are added those of a self-condemning conscience. He tries indeed to stifle the voice of conscience; and betakes himself to business, and pleasures, and company, in order to get rid of its remonstrances; but there are times when it will speak, especially a time of sickness and approaching dissolution; and at those seasons he feels regret that he has so long and so entirely disregarded his eternal interests. Gladly at such a season would he consent to have his miserable life contracted to a short period, or to suffer annihilation; not because he could contemplate either the one or the other with pleasure, but because he dreads the judgment for which he has neglected to prepare.

Say, brethren, whether such away is not hard and painful? Yet I appeal to the conscience of every man, whether that declaration be not verified in his own experience, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked! [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21)." Yes, truly, this testimony is incontrovertible; and it proves beyond all doubt the truth in my text, that "the way of transgressors is hard!"

But all this is heightened by the consideration that,

III. The lost sinner's whole life is a state of **danger**.

In some respect it may be said of every man, that he is exposed to danger, and that "we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth." But, if we are servants of Christ, we have nothing to fear; since He has pledged to preserve us from everything that shall be really evil, and to make "all things work together for our good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)." Even death itself is a blessing to the pious man, who is privileged to count it among his richest treasures! [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22).

Far different from this, however, is the state of the ungodly man; he knows not but that the next moment may precipitate him into the bottomless abyss of Hell. Death waits but for its commission from on high, and it will in an instant transmit his soul to the bar of judgment, and to the presence of his offended God. What a fearful thought! With what terror would it inspire the unconverted man, if it were contemplated aright! Could we but conceive an unsaved man hurried to the tribunal of his Judge, to give up his great account, and to receive his final doom—what a view would we have of the folly of his ways! Oh! the anguish to which he is now subjected under the wrath of an avenging God? What "weeping" under the load of his misery! What "wailing" on account of his folly, in having so wasted his day of grace! What "gnashing of teeth," with unprofitable execrations against his avenging God! Such is the danger to which the unconverted man is every moment exposed. At his most joyous feasts, this sword is suspended over him by a single hair; which cut or torn asunder, he is instantly consigned to endless woe. Whether the transgressor realizes it or not—this is his state; and a miserable state it is; and if he does not awake out of it before death shall seize him, it would have been better for him that he had never been born!

Improvement.

1. How desirable is the conversion of the soul to God!

Compare the state of a converted soul, with that which has been described above. The saint, doubtless, has his trials, as well as the ungodly man; but in him, so far as it prevails, religion makes a most essential difference, "it frees him from the law of sin and death, [Romans 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.2);" and he finds all its ways to be the ways of pleasantness and peace [Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17)." If men consulted only their happiness in this life, they would devote themselves to God, whose service is perfect freedom. But if they take eternity into the account, they will confess him to be the only happy man, who enjoys God's favor and looks forward with confidence to a participation of the Divine glory.

2. How foolish are those who delay to seek conversion!

Truly, if men were conscious of their danger in an unconverted state, they could no more sleep than they could in a ship that was on fire, or on a raft on which they were making their escape to land. I beg you, beloved, consider the shortness and uncertainty of time! Consider how every day's continuance in sin operates:  
to grieve the Holy Spirit of God,  
to harden your own hearts,  
to confirm your evil habits,  
to accumulate your load of guilt, and  
to augment the misery that awaits you.

O! will you delay to turn unto your God?

Will you delay one single hour? What if your soul is required of you this very night, and your doom be fixed without a hope or possibility of change forever? I beseech you, today, while it is called today, harden not your hearts; but "repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin!"

#782

THE FOLLY OF MAKING A MOCK AT SIN

**[Proverbs 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.9)**

"Fools mock at sin!"

Man in his first creation was formed after the Divine image; and there was not in his soul the least inclination to evil of any kind. But since his fall, he has become in love with sin; sin is the very element in which he lives; and so unconscious is he of its malignity, that he makes a mock at it. Doubtless all do not carry their impiety to the same extent. Some are openly profane, and given up to all manner of wickedness; not only not being ashamed of their ways, but actually "boasting in their shame!"

We must not however restrict to people of this description the declaration in our text. The evil that is there complained of is of far wider extent, it more or less attaches to every unconverted man. This will appear, while we open to you,

I. The **conduct** which God here reprobates—mocking at sin.

Let us remember what sin is, "it is the transgression of the law, [1 John 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.4)." Whichever table of the law is broken, or whatever command is violated, the violation of it is sin; and to make light of that transgression, whether it is more or less heinous in itself, is to mock at sin. Bearing this in mind, we say, that this evil is committed,

1. By those who live in sin themselves.

Passing over the drunkard, who says to his companions, "We will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day and much more abundant, [Isaiah 56:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.12);" and the thief, who invites his fellows, "Come, let us lay wait for blood, that we may fill our houses with spoil, [Proverbs 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.11); [Proverbs 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.13);" and the vile prostitute, who "impudently" assaults with importunity the unwary youth, [Proverbs 7:6-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 7.6-18); or a variety of other characters alike deplorable and shameful; passing by these, I say, (whom to have named is quite sufficient,) let us look to the worldling, who, though walking in a more sober way, lives altogether for himself; or look to the self-righteous, who though admired and applauded as characters of superior excellence, have:  
no true humiliation before God,  
no earnest desires after the Savior,  
no real delight in holy exercises,  
no fixedness of mind to glorify their God.

What shall I say of them all?

Have they any just views of sin?

Have they any suitable apprehensions of the state to which they have been brought by means of sin?

Do not their whole spirit and character show that they think light of sin? and, if it were set before them in all its malignity and deservings, would they not say that the representation was exaggerated, and that the person who gave them the representation, was deceived? They need not utter any words, to betray the thoughts of their hearts; these are sufficiently evident by the absence of all those feelings which a just estimate of sin would create; and exactly as those who imagine that God will never punish sin, are said to "despise God, [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13)." So may those, who think that sin will not involve us in punishment, be justly said to despise sin, and, in heart at least, if not in act, to "make a mock at it."

2. By those who deride piety in others.

Though a form of godliness will gain us applause, no man begins to experience the power of it without exposing himself to the censure of an ungodly world. Let a person be really broken-hearted and contrite, as every sinner ought to be;  
let him be seeking the Lord Jesus Christ with his whole heart;  
let him turn his back upon the vanities of the world, and separate himself from the society of those who would ensnare his soul;  
let him give himself to reading the holy Scriptures, to devout meditation, to fervent prayer, to a diligent use of all the appointed ordinances of religion;  
let him join himself to the Lord's people, and choose the excellent of the earth for his companions;  
let him, in a word, be in earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold on eternal life;  
let him do this, and his nearest friends will instantly dissuade him from such a course. They will represent to him the foolishness of such excessive measures. They will complain of him as being a wild enthusiast. They will impute the change that has taken place in him to weakness, or vanity, or perhaps to hypocrisy and ostentation.

Now then I ask, whence would such a disapprobation of his ways arise? Are they not such ways as are marked out by God? Are they not the very footsteps of the flock who have gone before him? Is not this course precisely such as common sense would dictate, and such as all mankind would approve—if the bodily life were in danger? Who would complain of earnestness in a shipwrecked mariner? Who would deride the cries and fears and efforts of a person endeavoring to escape from a house on fire? Yet in matters relating to the soul and to eternity, no sooner is the importance of salvation felt, and manifested, as it ought to be—than all who have any influence endeavor to discourage the exertions, of the awakened soul. Could this be, if sin were viewed by them as God views it? No! The people who thus disapprove fervent piety, declare that they see no occasion for it; that we may very well be saved without it; and that sin has no such terrors but that a moderate degree of attention will not suffice to escape from its threatened dangers. What is this, but to "mock at sin?"

That such conduct may appear in its true light, I proceed to show,

II. The **folly** of mocking at sin.

1. However much the ungodly mock at sin, they can never alter the nature of it.

Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates! [Jeremiah 44:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.4)." He cannot look upon it, or on those who commit it, without the utmost abhorrence, [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13). Sin is, whether we will believe it or not, "exceedingly sinful! [Romans 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.13)."

We are told by the prophet that many will "call evil good, and good evil; and will put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)." But if the whole universe would do this, would they alter the essential qualities of these things? Would darkness cease to be darkness, and serve all the purposes of light? Or would bitter change its properties to sweetness?

In the same way, Whatever harmless construction the wicked may put upon sin, and however they may mitigate its horribleness—sin will ever remain immutably the same: a defiling, debasing, damning evil—more to be dreaded than death itself!

The ungodly may imagine that sin is harmless; but in the end "it bites like a serpent, and poison like a viper!" [Proverbs 23:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.32)." They may roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongues; but it will become a poisonous venom in their hearts!

2. However much the ungodly mock at sin, **they can never cannot avert the consequences of sin**.

God has said, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)."

Now they may imagine that God regards sin as inconsequential, but He will never separate the penalty from the offence.

They may represent their sins as trivial; and may expatiate upon the goodness of God, and the impossibility of His visiting such small offences with such a tremendous punishment; but they shall never prevail on Him to rescind His decree, or to reverse His sentence. He has said, "The soul that sins, it shall surely die!" [Ezekiel 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.20). And die it shall, even "the second death, in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!"

Even if the whole universe should combine their efforts to avert the consequences of sin, they can never prevail in any single instance! [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21). "The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men! [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18)." Sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one impenitent transgressor escape. How great then must be the folly of mocking at sin!

If the ungodly convince themselves that their sins shall go unpunished, they only deceive themselves, and rivet the chains with which sin and Satan have already bound them!

Solomon's views of such conduct is correct: All who mock at sin are utter fools!

To all of you then I would say in **conclusion**,

1. Never make light of sin!

Your souls, your immortal souls, are at stake! Were the consequences of your error only temporary, we might leave you to enjoy your own delusions; but they are eternal! There is no repentance in the grave. "As the tree falls, so it will lie." If you die under the guilt of sin, your doom is irreversible, and your misery is everlasting! How do millions that are now in the eternal world curse their folly for making light of sin, in direct opposition to all that God had spoken in his Word respecting it! I beg you then be wise in time; and seek without delay to obtain "the forgiveness of your sins through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! [Colossians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.14)."

2. Never regard the scoffs of those who mock at sin.

Suppose it to be desirable to possess the good opinion of the world; yet surely to purchase it at the expense of your immortal soul is to pay too high a price for it; it is but for a moment, at all events; and though it is valuable so far as it may give you an influence over them for their good—yet it cannot for one moment be put in competition with the testimony of a good conscience, and the approbation of your God.

You are taught to expect, that if you will not approve the world in their ways, they will do all they can to disapprove you in yours. You see that this has been the case from the beginning; from the time of Abel to this hour, "they who have been born after the flesh have persecuted those who are born of the Spirit, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29);" and not even the Lord Jesus Christ himself could escape their reproaches. "If then they called the Master of the house Beelzebub," wonder not if his servants also be designated by reproachful names, [Matthew 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.25). If mockings and scoffings come upon you for righteousness sake, receive them as a token for good, [Luke 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.13). "Unto you; not against you.", and bless God that you are "counted worthy to endure them! [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41)." God permits these things as trials of your faith and love; and if they at any time appear grievous to you, then think of the plaudit of your Judge, and how speedily the very people who now condemn you will themselves "awake to shame and everlasting contempt! [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2)," and will be among the foremost to proclaim your praise. "Be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life!"

3. Endeavor so to walk, that those who mock at sin may have no genuine reason given them to mock at righteousness also.

While you in departing from evil "condemn the world, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7)," you may be well assured that they will be glad enough to find occasion against you, and to condemn religion on your account. Endeavor then to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)." Let the world "have no fault to find in you, except concerning the law of your God, [Daniel 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.5)." Do not let your regard for the duties of the first table lead you to neglect those of the second table; but be careful to fulfill the duty of your place and station towards man, as well as that which consists in the more immediate service of your God. Be careful to avoid all needless singularities, which in the sight of God make you neither better nor worse.

As for preventing the world from taking offence, that is impossible. Darkness must of necessity "hate the light;" but take care that the light be that which proceeds from God, and not from any "sparks of your own kindling." "Walk in wisdom towards them that are outside, [Colossians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.5);" "give them no occasion to speak reproachfully, [1 Timothy 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.14);" but so cause "your light to shine before them, that they may be led to glorify your heavenly Father." Thus, though you should not "win them by your good conduct," you may at least hope "to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.15);" and constrain them, in spite of all their mocking, to confess, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor! [Proverbs 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.26)."

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MAN'S EXPERIENCE KNOWN TO HIMSELF ALONE

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

"Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy!"

The inward experience of men, any further than it is manifested by acts or other outward signs, must of necessity be known to themselves alone. Paul puts the question to us, "Who knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him, [1 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.11)." Whether a man be filled with sorrow or joy, he alone can be sensible of the measure and extent of his own feelings.

The assertions in my text will be found true,

I. In reference to the concerns of **this world**.

Great are the troubles of many, as arising from their own unhappy hearts; from their connections in life; or from circumstances of poverty in their affairs. And who but themselves can fully appreciate their sorrows? On the other hand, the comforts of many are considerable, as flowing from the exercise of benevolence and love; from the endearments of domestic life; and from that success in their affairs which enables them to supply with ease the needs of themselves and families. Of the satisfaction which they feel, a stranger would form a very inadequate conception.

II. In reference to the concerns of the **soul**.

In matters relating to the soul, the feelings are still more acute. None but the person feeling it can tell "the bitterness" which is occasioned:  
by a sense of sin with all its aggravations;  
by the prospect of death and judgment, while the soul is unprepared to meet its God;  
and by temptations to despondency, and perhaps to suicide itself!

Job's friends could not at all appreciate his sorrows, as depicted by himself, [Job 6:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.2-4); Nor can any, but the man whose "heart is thus broken," conceive fully what "a broken and contrite spirit is".

On the other hand, there are in the heart of a true Christian joys which a stranger cannot know. The peace that is experienced by him, when God speaks peace to his soul, "surpasses all understanding, [Philippians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.7)." And "the joys" with which he is transported, in the views of his Redeemer's glory, in the experience of God's love shed abroad in his heart, and in the pledge and foretaste of his eternal inheritance, "are unspeakable and full of glory, 1 Peter 1:8. See also [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-16) and [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14); [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

These joys are, "the white stone, with a new name written on it, which no man can read, but he who has received it, [Revelation 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.17)." Michal could not understand the exercises of David's mind, [2 Samuel 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.16); [2 Samuel 6:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.20-22). Nor can anyone fully estimate the blessedness of a soul, when thus admitted to close communion with its God.

**Learn** from hence.

Contentment. (the very people whom you envy, are perhaps even envying you.)

Charity. (we can see the outward act only, and can little tell what passes in the hearts of men, whether in a way of humiliation or desire.)

Earnestness in the ways of God; that you may attain the deepest measures of contrition, with the sublimest experience of joy.

The lower we lay our foundation, the higher we may hope our superstructure shall be raised.

#784

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE WAY OF SALVATION

**[Proverbs 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.12)**

"There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death!"

On no topic do men express a greater confidence than on the subject of religion; while that, of all subjects that can be offered to our consideration, requires most care in our inquiry, and most self-distrust in our decision.

All other subjects, as far as they can be determined at all, may be determined by reason; and in the investigation of them, reason is to a certain degree free, both in its deliberations and decisions.

But spiritual things must be spiritually discerned; they are out of the reach of reason. Reason must judge whether the things which are presented to it are revealed; but, when that point is ascertained, they must be apprehended by faith alone. Reason can tell us nothing about the mystery of redemption; it is faith alone that can apprehend that, or any of the other mysteries connected with it. Moreover, while reason can do so little in favor of religion, all the prejudices, and passions, and interests of mankind are acting in full force against it. Faith and sense are always at variance with each other, and always striving for the mastery; and unless faith is in lively exercise, sense is sure to triumph. Hence the Church of God is inundated with errors of various kinds; and hence we need to have frequently inculcated upon our minds the truth contained in our text, "There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

In illustration of this truth, I will point out some of those ways, which, though right in the estimation of those who walk in them, will assuredly terminate in death. No other outcome will there be to the way,

I. Of skeptical indifference.

There is a great degree of skepticism prevailing, in reference both to the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, and to all the principal doctrines contained in them; and men of considerable ability have labored much to invalidate the former, and to explain away the latter. Hence many will say, 'How can I ascertain what is true, amidst such a conflict of opinions?' or, 'How can I depend on anything, of which so many great and learned men have doubted? Is it reasonable to suppose that God will call us to an account for not admitting what has been so often controverted, and, in the opinion of some, so successfully refuted? Let us rather hope that God, as a God of mercy, will accept us all, though we do not all walk in that precise way, which those who profess a greater reverence for the Scriptures conceive to be right.'

But these hopes will be found fallacious at the last; for there is far more criminality in unbelief, than men in general are aware of.

Unbelief does not proceed from any lack of evidence in the Scriptures, but from an evil bias in the heart of man. There is "an evil heart of unbelief," which causes us to depart from the living God. Men will not submit to God, but will exalt themselves against him; and think themselves justified in rejecting whatever they, with the short line of their reason, are unable to fathom. What would a learned scientist think of a peasant who should argue thus in reference to sciences which the peasant was unable to comprehend? and in what light must God view us, when we presume to sit in judgment thus on the plainest declarations of his Word?

But supposing that there were not so much criminality in unbelief, should we be at all the more justified in neglecting our eternal interests? Does not reason itself teach us that we are responsible to God for our conduct; and that, whether our views of revelation be more or less clear, we should labor incessantly and with all our might to secure his favor? And should we not use all possible means, particularly such as he himself has prescribed, for the attaining of an insight into his revealed will?

However innocent we may imagine our skepticism to be, or however justifiable the indifference connected with it, this way will at last infallibly end in death! The Jews in the wilderness could not enter into the promised land because of their unbelief; and the same cause will operate also to the exclusion of our souls from Heaven! [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). The people who denied the Messiahship of Jesus surely thought that they were justified in so doing by a lack of evidence; but our Lord said to them, "If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins! [John 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.24);" and in like manner he has commanded it to be proclaimed to every man, "He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; but he who believes not, shall be damned! [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16)."

II. Of proud formality.

Multitudes there are, who, like the Pharisees of old, are extremely attentive to the established forms of religion, and are observant of morality also, as far as it is approved by the world. In relation to these things they may be said to be blameless; and so good is the opinion which they entertain of their own state, that they would, without any fear of being confounded, ask, "What more do I lack?" In this state they are approved and admired of men; and therefore they conclude, that they are equally acceptable in the sight of God also. People of this description scarcely ever entertain a doubt, or a fear, but that all will turn out well with them at the last. But they will find themselves awfully mistaken as soon as ever they die! They will then discover, that their obedience was infinitely more defective than ever they conceived it to be; and that, if it had been as blameless as they imagined, it would still have afforded them no ground of hope before God. Had such attainments as these sufficed, Paul needed never to have embraced the Gospel at all; or had they been capable of adding anything to the righteousness of Christ, he never would have desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which was of the law.

How erroneous a way to life this is, will be seen at once in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Few of the formalists of the present day can say so much in their own favor as he could; he could appeal to God that he was not guilty of such sins as were common in the world, and that, on the contrary, he was observant of many religious duties, "fasting twice every week, and giving tithes of all that he possessed." Yet, because he viewed his state with self-confidence and self-delight, he was dismissed without any blessing; while the self-abasing Publican was pardoned and justified from all his sins, [Luke 18:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.11-14). But thus it ever will be, "God will fill the hungry with good things, but the rich he will send away empty, [Luke 1:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.53), "he will resist the proud, but give grace unto the humble, [1 Peter 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.5)."

III. Of intolerant bigotry.

There are many who imagine that all religion consists in zeal for their own particular sect or party in the Church. Among the papists, this error prevails to an awful extent; and happy would it be if it were confined to them; but it is found in Protestants also, who are as bitter in judging each other, as the papists are in anathematizing them. At what a fearful distance are the churchmen and dissenters separated from each other, from the mere circumstance of their not adopting the same external form of Church government, even while they are perfectly agreed in sentiment as to all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity! From the spirit with which they view each other, one would be ready to think that Christ did indeed come to introduce division, not accidentally, but intentionally; not by a separation of his people from the world, but by an alienation of heart from each other.

Who has not seen and mourned over the mutual accusations of the two parties, each rejoicing in any evil that can be found in the other, and each wishing the conversion, perhaps I should rather say, the extermination, of the other?

And as men hate each other on account of outward forms, so no less are they embittered against each other by a difference in their internal principles; the Arminian hating the Calvinists; and the Calvinist despising the Arminians! Need I say how much some people value themselves on the opposition they give to what they call wild enthusiasm, but what, in fact, is "pure and undefiled religion?"

Truly, in persecuting the truth, they think that they do God service; and well pleased they are to render him a service so congenial with the malignity of their own hearts. Paul before his conversion was of this very spirit; and our Lord has told us, that in every age such would prove to be the persecutors and tormentors of his Church, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2). But whoever may be wrong, it is not possible for people of this description to be right; the very spirit which they breathe shows "whose they are, and whom they serve," even him "who was a murderer from the beginning! [John 8:39-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.39-44). [1 John 3:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.11-12); [1 John 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.15)," and who has been the great instigator of persecution from the time of Cain even to the present hour. Let such people only see Paul's review of his own conduct in relation to this matter, and he cannot doubt one moment where this path must lead, [1 Timothy 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13). Or if this does not convince him, then let him know, that if he possessed all the knowledge and faith and zeal of angels themselves, he would be only as "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal," because he is destitute of that prime grace which is essential to the very existence of true religion in the soul—the grace of love, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3).

IV. Of lukewarm attachment to the Gospel.

Where the Gospel is preached with fidelity, it commends itself to many as true, while they yet do not experience its saving power on their souls. Yet the very circumstance of their discerning and approving of it, is to them in the place of vital godliness, and an evidence that they are in the way to Heaven. But true religion is not a mere matter of opinion; it is a principle that pervades the soul, and operates upon all its faculties and powers. See how it wrought in the converts on the day of Pentecost; what new creatures they immediately became! And such will all become, as soon as ever they receive the grace of God in truth.

The metaphors by which the Christian life is designated in the Scriptures, sufficiently show how mistaken they are who rest in a mere approbation of the Gospel without feeling its constraining influence upon their souls. If the running of a race, or wrestling for the mastery, or fighting for one's life, have any just signification as applied to the Christian's state, it is impossible for those to be in the way of life who bear no resemblance whatever to people so engaged; and the total lack of concern and of exertion which they betray, proves, beyond all doubt, that they are not in the narrow way which leads unto life, but in the broad road that leads to destruction.

V. Of unsanctified profession.

Among the little company of the Apostles themselves, there was a Judas; and in all the Apostolic Churches also there were some who "professed that they knew God, but in works denied him." It must not be wondered at therefore, if such exist in the Church at this present day. Indeed the parable of the Sower, and that also of the Tares, teaches us to expect that Satan will sow tares among the wheat, and that it is not possible for man to separate them the one from the other. Unhappily, the people themselves who are unsound at heart are not conscious of it. Satan so blinds their eyes, that they cannot distinguish between the unallowed infirmities of their nature, and the indulged corruptions of their hearts. Their evil characters which are unsubdued, are regarded us light and trivial frailties; their carefulness about the things of this world is softened down to necessary prudence; and the reigning impurity of their hearts is closed under the veil of temptation. Whatever are their besetting sins, they find some excuse for them; and, because they have a zeal for the Gospel and make some sacrifices for it, they conclude that all is well with them. Having "a name to live," they have no conception that they can be really "dead." But such people need to be reminded of what our blessed Lord has so plainly and forcibly declared, namely, that one single lust retained in the soul, though as dear as a right eye or necessary as a right hand, will infallibly plunge the soul into that lake of fire that never shall be quenched [Mark 12:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.43-48). Our blessed Lord has warned us, that the "saying, Lord! Lord!" however confidently we may repeat it, will never avail us, while we do not obey the things which he says; and, that though we may have "cast out devils in his name," we shall find no acceptance with him in the day of judgment, if we have not really, and unreservedly, mortified the whole body of sin [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23). [Luke 13:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.26-27). Let all professors of religion know assuredly, that "without holiness, real and universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14);" and that, whatever estimate they may form of their own state, "not he who commends himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commends [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18)."

Seeing then that so many mistake the way to Heaven,

I will add a few words,

1. To guard you against all erroneous ways.

There is one great evil which more or less pervades all descriptions of men, and that is, an undue confidence in their own opinions. If they "think a thing to be right," they conclude that it is right, and will take no pains to ascertain the truth or falsehood of their judgment. They do not think:  
of the deceitfulness of sin,  
or of the blindness of their own hearts,  
or of the subtlety of Satan.

They go on confidently, as if they were in no danger of self-deceit. But why has God so often repeated that admonition, "Do not be deceived!" if we are not in danger of being carried away by our own delusions? We are told of many whom a deceived heart has turned aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And why should not this be our state, as well as the state of others? We actually see it in others—why then should we not suspect it in ourselves? It is certain that a man may "seem to be religious, and yet deceive his own soul, and have all his religion vain," because of some one sin that is unsubdued, and unperceived within him, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26). I can never therefore too earnestly impress upon your minds the necessity of self-distrust in all that relates to your souls.

There is but one standard of truth; and by that must every opinion be tried. If the way which you think right will stand the trial of God's Word, it is well; but, if it accords not with God's Word, thenit will prove delusive in the end, and issue in the everlasting destruction of your souls. Be it ever so subtle, it cannot deceive God. To all then I would say: Act in reference to your souls as the mariner does in navigating a dangerous sea; he consults his chart and his compass continually; and, not contented with thinking himself right, he puts his thoughts to the test, and seeks for evidence that he is right. Then may you hope to avoid the rocks and quicksands on which so many thousands perish; and to safely reach the haven you desire!

2. To point out the only true way.

There is a way which seems indeed wrong to the greater part of mankind, which, however, is surely right, and the end thereof are the ways of life. This is the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; as Christ himself has told us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)." This indeed is not approved by the world at large, "to the Jews it is a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23);" but it is "the good old way, wherein whoever walks shall find rest unto his soul, [Jeremiah 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.16). [Matthew 11:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28-29)." Let it not be any matter of astonishment that this way is not generally approved; for it is too humiliating for our proud hearts, and too self-denying for our low and groveling spirits. Men do not love to renounce all self-dependence, and to have all their wisdom, all their righteousness, and all their strength treasured up in another for their use, to be received daily out of his fullness in answer to urgent and believing prayer. Nor do they like to have that high standard of holiness, which he gives to his disciples as the rule of their life, be the test of their attainments. But, beloved, this is the only true way to Heaven; we must believe in Christ, and live altogether by faith in him, going forward in his strength, and "growing up into him in all things as our living head." Then, though regarded by men as self-deluding enthusiasts, we shall be approved of our God, and receive at last "the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls!"

#785

THE VANITY OF CARNAL MIRTH

**[Proverbs 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.13)**

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful;

and the end of that mirth is heaviness!"

We are apt to imagine that whatever is sanctioned by the approbation and practice of the world at large, must be right; but we cannot have a more erroneous standard than popular opinion! This is sufficiently evident from the estimation in which mirth and laughter are generally held; they are supposed to constitute the chief happiness of man; whereas they are far from producing any solid happiness at all. To this mistake Solomon refers, in the words preceding the text; and in the text itself he confirms the truth of his own position.

I. We shall demonstrate **the vanity of carnal mirth**.

We do not mean to condemn all kinds and degrees of mirth; there certainly is a measure of it that is conducive to good, rather than to evil, "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance," and "does good like a medicine."

But carnal mirth is distinct from cheerfulness of disposition; inasmuch as carnal mirth argues a light frivolous state of mind, and indisposes us for serious and heavenly contemplations.

1. We affirm that **carnal**mirth is **empty**.

Let us examine the mirth which we have at any time experienced; let us weigh it in a balance; let us compare it with that sobriety of mind which results from scenes of woe, and with that tenderness of spirit which is the offspring of sympathy and compassion—and we shall confess, with Solomon, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting! [Ecclesiastes 7:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.1-3);" yes, the more we examine it, the more shall we be constrained, like him, to "say of laughter. It is mad! and of mirth, What does it accomplish? [Ecclesiastes 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.1-2)." It may be justly called, "a filling of our belly with the east wind! [Job 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.2)."

2. We affirm that **carnal**mirth is **fictitious**.

The gaiety which is exhibited in worldly company is often pretended, for the purpose of concealing the real feelings of the heart. They who appear so delighted to see each other, have frequently no mutual affection. Even the nearest relatives, who seem to participate in each other's joys, have so little real cordiality at home, that they can scarcely endure each other's conversation; and would be heartily glad, if the knot which binds them together could be dissolved.

Truly "in their laughter their heart is sorrowful;" their pride, their envy, their jealousy, their private arguments, their domestic troubles, or their worldly cares—make them inwardly sigh, so that they can with difficulty prevent the discovery of the imposture which they are practicing. The very emptiness of their pleasure fills them often with disgust; and they are constrained to acknowledge that "they are feeding on ashes, and that they have a lie in their right hand! [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)."

3. We affirm that **carnal**mirth is **transient**.

Suppose it to have been far more substantial than it has—yet how speedily has it vanished away! What trace of it remains?

It is like a dream when one awakes; in our dream we thought of satisfaction; but when we awoke, we found ourselves as unsatisfied as ever! [Isaiah 29:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.8). If we thought by repeated participation to protract the pleasure, we weakened the zest with which we had partaken of it; and thus diminished, rather than increased, the sum of our enjoyment.

4. We affirm that **carnal**mirth is **delusive**.

We hoped that the ultimate effect of all our mirth would be a comfortable frame of mind; but has it always been so? Has not the very reverse been often experienced by us? Has not "the end of our mirth been heaviness?" An excessive elevation of spirit is naturally calculated to produce depression. Besides, we cannot always shake off reflection; and the thought of having so foolishly wasted our time, instead of improving it in preparation for eternity—will sometimes produce very uneasy sensations. Such warnings as Solomon in [Ecclesiastes 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.9), and our Lord in [Luke 6:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.25), have given us—will frequently obtrude themselves upon us, and make us almost weary of life, while at the same time we are afraid of death; so justly is this mirth compared to "the crackling of thorns under a pot! [Ecclesiastes 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.6);" the one, after an unprofitable blaze, terminating in smoke and darkness, the other, after a senseless noise, expiring in depression. In fact, there are no people more subject to depression of spirit, than those who spend their time in vanity and dissipation!

What will be "the end of their mirth" when they come into the eternal world, is inexpressibly awful to consider. Fearful indeed will be the contrast between the festivities of their present, and the wailings of their eternal state, [Amos 6:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 6.1-6). Would to God that man would learn this from a parable, [Luke 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.19); [Luke 16:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.24-25). But, if they will not, they must realize it in their own eternal experience.

That we may not appear as if we would deprive you of all happiness:

II. We shall now show how we may attain more solid joy.

There is evidently a contrast intended in the text; for when it is said that "the end of that mirth is heaviness," it is implied, that there is another species of mirth that shall end in a very different manner.

The Gospel is a source of joy to all who embrace it.

The Gospel is called "glad tidings of great joy to all people." It proclaims salvation to a ruined world; nor can it fail of creating the liveliest emotions of joy wherever it is received, [Isaiah 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.3); [Isaiah 51:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.11); [Isaiah 65:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.18) and [Jeremiah 31:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.4) with [Acts 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.8); [Acts 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.39).

The joy resulting from the Gospel is the very reverse of carnal mirth.

Gospel joy is solid. Behold the change wrought in the first converts! see them turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God! See them enjoying peace with God and in their own consciences! See them filled with love to each other, and with admiring and adoring thoughts of their beloved Savior! Can we wonder that they ate their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God?

Yet precisely the same grounds of joy has every one that truly believes in Christ, [Jeremiah 31:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.11-14). The Prodigal imagined that he was in the road to joy, when he was wasting his substance in riotous living; but he never tasted real happiness until he returned to his father's house; then "he began to eat, and drink, and be merry."

Gospel joy is permanent. It will consist with trials and tribulations; yes, it will even arise out of them! [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3). [James 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2). We may be "sorrowful—yet always rejoicing [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)." And, as Gospel joy is not interrupted by the occurrences of life, so neither will it be terminated by death; it will then be augmented a thousand-fold; and continue without interruption to all eternity!

ADDRESS.

1. The young and carnally mirthful.

Follow your career of pleasure as long as you will, you will be constrained to say at last, with Solomon, not only that it was all "vanity," but also "vexation of spirit." Yet think not, that in dissuading you from these lying vanities, we would deprive you of all happiness. We only wish that you should exchange that which is empty and delusive, for that which will afford you present and eternal satisfaction! [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2). Even your past experience may suffice to show you, that "in the fullness of your sufficiency you have been in straits, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)." Try now what the service and enjoyment of God can do for you; and you shall find that God's "ways are indeed ways of pleasantness and peace."

2. Those who profess godliness.

In avoiding carnal mirth, you must be careful not to give occasion to the world to represent the gospel as sour and morose. There is a cheerfulness which recommends the gospel, and which it is both your duty and privilege to maintain.

Yet, on the other hand, beware of levity. Live near to God, and you will easily find the proper medium. "God has certainly given you all things richly to enjoy! [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17);" yet it is in himself alone, and in the light of his countenance, that you must seek your chief happiness. There you are sure to find it, [Psalm 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6-7); and while you find it in him, you will shine as lights in a dark world, and recommend the Gospel to all around you.

#786

THE DANGER OF BACKSLIDING

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

"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; and a godly man shall be satisfied with his."

Though God does not select those as objects of his mercy, who are most diligent in external duties—yet he increases his favors to those whom he has chosen, in proportion as they themselves are earnest in improving what he has already bestowed upon them. In the dispensations of his providence it is generally found, that "the diligent hand makes rich;" but in the dispensations of his grace, this seems to be an unalterable rule of his procedure, "whatever a man sows, that he may assuredly expect to reap;" "to him who has, shall be given, and he shall have abundance." To this effect are the declarations before us; in which we may observe,

I. The danger of backsliding.

Open apostasy is confessedly a certain road to destruction; but we may also perish by indulging the more subtle and equally dangerous habit of secret declension. Not that every variation in our frame constitutes us backsliders in heart; (for who then could be saved?)

1. We are "backsliders in heart" when we are **habitually remiss in secret duties**.

It is possible that we may once have run well, and enjoyed much blessedness in the service of our God; and yet have been so hindered in our course, as to have relapsed into a state of coldness and formality! [Galatians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.6); [Galatians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.7); [Galatians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.15). The Word, which was once precious, may have lost its savor. And prayer, which was once delightful, may have become an irksome task. Both public and private ordinances may have degenerated into an empty form, in which God is not enjoyed, nor is any blessing received. Where this is the case the person must surely be denominated a "backslider in heart."

2. We are "backsliders in heart" when we **habitually indulge any secret lusts**.

Whatever attainments a man may have made in religion, if his heart is not whole with God, he will sooner or later decline; and that which was his besetting sin in his state of ignorance, will regain its ascendency, and (as far at least as relates to its inward workings) recover its dominion over him.

He may still, for his profession sake, restrain sin, in a measure, as to its outward exercise, while yet its inward power is unsubdued. Was he naturally addicted to pride, envy, malice, covetousness, lewdness, or any other sin? If he allows it to return upon him after he has been once purged from it, [2 Peter 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.9); [2 Peter 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20). [Galatians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.16), if he is averse to have the evil of it pointed out to him, if he justifies it, or covers his fault with excuses, instead of endeavoring earnestly to amend it—then he certainly is a backslider in heart.

In either of these states we are exposed to the most imminent danger!

There are a variety of ways in which God will punish sin, but none so terrible as that specified in the words before us. If God were to fill the backslider with acute and long-continued pain, or visit him with some other temporal affliction, it might work for good, and bring him to consideration and repentance; but if God gives him up to his own heart's lusts, and leaves him to be "filled with his own ways,"—then nothing but a certain and aggravated condemnation can ensue!

Was he far from God? He will be further still!

Was he addicted to any sin? He will be more and more enslaved by it!

Nor can there be a doubt, but that God will give us up to this judgment, if we return to the indulgence of willful neglects and secret sins, [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12). [Deuteronomy 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.15); [Deuteronomy 32:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.18-20). [Proverbs 1:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.30-31).

But we shall see a strong additional motive to persevere, if we consider,

II. The benefit of maintaining steadfastness in religion.

The "godly man" is here put in contrast with the backslider.

As every occasional declension does not denominate a man to be a willful backslider, so neither does every transient inclination to virtue denominate a man to be godly. To be truly godly, he must set out well, and "hold on his way," causing his "light to shine more and more unto the perfect day, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18)."

Such a one shall find much satisfaction both in and from his way:

He shall have the comfort of seeing that he is advancing in godliness.

The testimony of a good conscience is one of the richest comforts we can enjoy! [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12). Hezekiah pleaded it before God in a dying hour, not indeed as a ground of justification before him, but as a ground whereon he might hope for mercy with respect to the continuance of this present life [2 Kings 20:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.2-3). And Paul, in the near prospect of the eternal world, found a good conscience to be a source of unutterable joy! [2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8).

Now this satisfaction every upright soul shall enjoy. If he cannot distinctly see the progressive steps of his advancement from day to day, he shall have a testimony in his own conscience that he is on the whole advancing; he shall feel himself more and more fixed in his "purpose to cleave unto the Lord," and increasingly desirous of approving himself faithful to his God and Savior.

He shall also enjoy more abundant manifestations of God's love.

God will not leave his people without witness that he is pleased with their endeavors to serve and honor him. "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." If he beholds any striving to please him, "he will love them and come unto them, and sup with them, and manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world, [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23). [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20);" and the more diligent he sees them in doing his will, the more richly will he impart to them the tokens of his love, and the more abundantly communicate to them the blessings of grace and peace! [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17).

His prospects, moreover, of the eternal world shall be more bright and glorious.

To many does God grant, as to Moses from Mount Pisgah, delightful prospects of the heavenly Canaan. He draws aside the veil, and allows them to enter into the holy of holies, that they may behold his glory, and receive a foretaste of the blessedness which they shall one day enjoy in his presence.

But on whom are these special favors bestowed? On the slothful, the careless, the inconstant? No! It is "the faithful man that shall abound with these blessings;" it is "him who rejoices in working righteousness, that the Lord will meet" in this intimate and endearing manner, [Proverbs 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.20). [Isaiah 33:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14-17); [Isaiah 64:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.5).

INFERENCES.

1. How much more ready is God to show mercy, than to execute his judgments!

Had God been extreme to mark what is done amiss, who is there among us, whom he would not often have abandoned in an hour of secret declension? But he is full of compassion; and "judgment is his strange work," to which he is greatly averse. At this very moment does he follow the backslider with the most earnest invitations, and most gracious promises, saying, "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely! [Jeremiah 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.22). [Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4)." Let us thankfully acknowledge his patience and forbearance; and seek that happiness in the service of our God, which we shall in vain look for in any deviations from the path of duty.

2. What need have we to watch over our own hearts!

We are bidden to "keep our hearts with all diligence, because out of them are the issues of life and death! [Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.23);" and indeed we have need to guard guard our hearts, because are so "bent to backslide from God." It will be rarely, if ever, found, that the watchful Christian is left to fall into any gross sin. Men decline from God in secret, before he withdraws from them his restraining grace! They have chosen some evil "way of their own," and deliberately followed it in their hearts, before God leaves them to be "filled with it." If then we would not be swept away with a deluge of iniquity—then let us be careful to stop the breach at first; for, if left a little time, it will widen, until it defies our utmost exertions!

The present satisfaction, as well as the future salvation, of our souls depends on a steadfast walk with God. Let us then "hold fast the profession of our faith, and the practice of our duty, without wavering;" and "let us look to ourselves that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward! [2 John 8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 John 8)."

#787

THE FEAR OF THE LORD A SOURCE OF MUCH GOOD

**[Proverbs 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.26)**

"In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence,  
 and His children will have a place of refuge."

In the Holy Scriptures there is often much contained in a in a few words. Hence we read them frequently without discerning half of their beauty and importance. In the passage before us, we have in a concentrated form the benefits arising from the fear of God. They are two:

I. Confidence.

Before we speak of the benefit itself, we must endeavor to attain accurate views of that from which it flows. By "the fear of the Lord," I understand such a fear as brings us to his footstool; and such a fear as stimulates us to an unreserved surrender of ourselves to him. It is clear that it must comprehend these, and cannot possibly exist without them [Psalm 112:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.1); Now, wherever this is found, there is "a strong confidence" of acceptance with God; a confidence founded,

1. On the general character of God.

There is, in the mind of every one who has the least knowledge of God, a persuasion that "he delights in mercy;" and though this of itself is not sufficient to warrant a confidence of our acceptance with him, it is a strong confirmation of our confidence, when we have really come to him with a humble believing, and obediential fear.

2. On the Scripture account of him, as revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

There we see his assumption of our nature, his death upon the cross as an atonement for our sins, his ascension to Heaven, to govern all things for the good of his Church and people. O! what confidence must such wonders of love and mercy inspire! Can we turn to him in faith and fear, and doubt his willingness to receive us? Impossible. It cannot be but that our "confidence" in such a God must be "strong [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

3. On the express promises which he has given us in his Word.

These are "exceeding great and precious," and fully commensurate with all our needs. There is no state in which we can be, that has not a promise especially adapted to it. Only let those be embraced, and the most desponding soul must be comforted [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18). [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20).

To them, under all circumstances, is afforded,

II. Safety.

They stand in the relation of "children" to God, who "is not ashamed to be called their God" and Father. And to them there is ever open "a place of refuge,"

1. From the calamities of life.

True, the saints are exposed to calamities like other men; but they see that everything, whoever be the instrument, proceeds in reality from their Father's hand, who sends it only for their good. Hence the very character of the visitation is changed; and instead of being an occasion for mourning, it is welcomed as a blessing in disguise [Proverbs 19:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.23). [Psalm 91:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-12).

2. From the assaults of Satan.

Doubtless Satan will exert himself to the uttermost to harass and destroy them [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8); but they are furnished with armor to withstand his fiercest assaults [Ephesians 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12-13); and they have an impregnable fortress ever open to them, even "the name of the Lord, which is to them as a strong tower, wherein they are safe [Proverbs 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.10)." And, after maintaining their conflict the appointed time, they are sure of beholding "him bruised under their feet [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

3. From the fears of death.

Death is still an enemy; but they triumph over him, saying, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" They are enabled to number him among their friends and treasure [1 Corinthians 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.23); and to long for his arrival, to introduce them into the more immediate presence of their God [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23).

4. From all the penal consequences of sin.

At the very bar of judgment itself they stand with great boldness. The curses of the Law infuse no terror into their minds; because they can point to "Him who has redeemed them from its curse, having himself become a curse for them [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)." "To them there is no condemnation [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1);" to them remains nothing but unbounded, everlasting bliss.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who have confidence without fear.

This is the state of the world at large; But such confidence is presumption [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20) and [1 Thessalonians 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.3); it is "the broken and contrite soul, and that alone, which God will not despise;" To them, therefore, would I say, "Awake, and arise; and Christ will give you light [Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14)."

2. Those who have fear without confidence.

Brethren, you should not so dishonor your Lord and Savior. If only you have such a fear of God as humbles you before him, and makes you desire truly and sincerely to serve him, what reason have you to entertain any doubt of his willingness to save you? Has God become a man for you, and died upon the cross for you; and is he ordering everything for you, both in Heaven and earth; and should you not trust in him? Be ashamed of entertaining such unworthy thoughts of him, and cast yourselves altogether upon him both for time and for eternity.

3. Those who have the happiness of uniting both.

This is the state in which you should both live and die. It is the due mixture of fear and confidence which will bring you to that holy frame in which God most delights [Acts 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.31) and [Psalm 115:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 115.13). He would have you ever to "rejoice with trembling," and to tremble with rejoicing.

#788

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD

**[Proverbs 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.3)**

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place,  
 beholding the evil and the good!"

The omnipresence of God is plain and obvious to all who have learned to acknowledge the Scriptures. The heathen indeed, who worshiped a multitude of gods, assigned to each his proper limits, conceiving that they who could exert their power in the hills, were destitute of power in the neighboring valleys. But this absurd idea arose from their polytheism; and vanishes the very instant we confess the true God. The Scriptures place this matter beyond a doubt; virtually every page of the inspired volume either expressly asserts the omnipresence of God, or takes it for granted as an unquestionable truth. In the words before us, Solomon not only affirms it, but declares, that God is actively employed throughout the whole universe in inspecting the ways of men.

In discoursing on his words we shall show,

I. The truth of the omnipresence of God.

One would suppose that reason itself might discern the point in question; for, if God is not everywhere present, how can he either govern, or judge, the world? His creatures, if removed from the sphere of his observation, would be independent of him; and, if withdrawn from his sight, would cease to feel any responsibility for their actions; since, being ignorant of what they did, he would be altogether unqualified to pass upon them any sentence of condemnation or acquittal.

But, to proceed on surer ground, let us notice the declarations of holy men, and especially of God himself, respecting this point.

If we look into the Old Testament, we shall find, that the testimony of all the prophets is in perfect correspondence with those words of David, "The LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts! 1 Chronicles 28:9." Sometimes they assert this matter as a thing they know, and are assured of, "I know," says Job, "that no thought can be withheld from you! [Job 42:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.2)." Sometimes, with yet greater energy, they make it a subject of appeal to the whole universe, defying anyone to gainsay, or even to doubt, it, "Does he not see my ways, and count all my steps! [Job 31:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.4)." Sometimes they labor to convey this truth under the most impressive images, "His eyes behold, his eye-lids try, the children of men! [Psalm 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.4)."

In the New Testament, the same important truth is inculcated in terms equally clear and energetic. Not to mention mere assertions, [John 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.20), or acknowledgments, [John 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.17), that "God knows all things," the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews represents the perfect insight of God into the hearts of men under the image of the sacrifices, which, when flayed and cut down the back-bone, were open to the minutest inspection of the priests, "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13)."

But let us now turn our attention to God's own declarations. He is peculiarly jealous with respect to this attribute. In reference to "places" and "people," he says, "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Do not I fill Heaven and earth? says the Lord, [Jeremiah 23:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.23-24)."

Again, in reference to things that might be supposed most beyond his reach, he says, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them! [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.5). [Deuteronomy 31:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.21)." And when an atheistic world have entertained doubts respecting this, and said, "Thick clouds are a covering to him! [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14);" "he cannot see, he will not regard us;" he has risen with utter indignation to vindicate his injured honor, "Understand you brutish among the people; and, you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall he not hear? He who formed the eye, shall he not see? [Psalm 94:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7-9)."

To multiply proofs of so plain a point is needless.

We shall therefore pass on to show,

II. The concern we have in the omnipresence of God.

Here the text directs and limits our views. "The evil and the good" are objects of his unwearied attention; and consequently, both the one and the other are equally interested in the subject before us.

Let "the evil" then consider their concern in this momentous truth. God views them all, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. If they come up to worship in his sanctuary, he sees their impious mockery, while "they draw near to him with their lips, but are far from him in their hearts! [Matthew 15:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-8)." He follows them to their families, and observes all their characters, dispositions, and conduct. He enters with them into their shops; he inspects their weights and measures; he examines their commodities; he hears their bargains; he marks their deviations from truth and honesty! [Micah 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.2); [Micah 6:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.10-12). He retires with them to their chambers, and "compasses about their beds," (for "the darkness and light to him are both alike") and notices their every thought! [Psalm 139:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.1-5). If they were to go up to Heaven, or down to Hell, they could not for one moment escape his all-seeing eye! [Psalm 139:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.7-12).

But for what end does he thus "behold" them? Is he a mere curious or unconcerned spectator? No! "he ponders all their goings, [Proverbs 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.21)," in order to restrain that excess of wickedness which would militate against his sovereign appointments, [Genesis 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 20.6); [Genesis 31:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 31.24); to confound their daring attempts against his church and people, [Exodus 14:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.24-25); and [Isaiah 37:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.28-29); to over-rule for the accomplishment of his own purposes the voluntary exercise of their own inveterate corruptions, [Psalm 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-6); and finally to justify himself in the eternal judgments, which he will hereafter inflict upon them! [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.10); [Jeremiah 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 16.17-18) and [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4).

O that the wicked would consider these things, and lay them to heart, while yet they might obtain mercy!

Next let "the good" consider their concern also in this truth. "God's eye is on them also; and his ear is open to their prayers, [Psalm 34:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.15)." He meets them in his house of prayer, [Isaiah 64:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.5). [Matthew 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.20); if there were but one broken-hearted sinner in the midst of a whole congregation, God would fix his eye in a more especial manner upon him, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2). When they go forth into the world, he follows them as closely as their shadow, [Joshua 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.9) with [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6). When they retire to their secret chamber, he "draws near to them, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8)," and "manifests himself to them as he does not unto the world, [John 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.22)."

And why is all this solicitude about such unworthy creatures? why is all this attention to their concerns? "Hear, O heavens; and be astonished, O earth!" God has deigned to inform us on this subject, and to declare, that he "beholds the good":  
to protect them in danger, [2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9). [Psalm 121:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 121.5-7); to comfort them in trouble, [Psalm 41:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.1); [Psalm 41:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.3);  
to supply their needs, [Psalm 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.18-19); [Psalm 34:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.9-10);  
to over-rule for good their multiplied afflictions, [Malachi 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.3);  
"as a refiner," [Job 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.10) with [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.2).

Lastly, he notices them, to observe the workings of his grace in them, [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8). [Jeremiah 31:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18); [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20), in order that he may proclaim before the assembled universe the secret exercises of piety in their hearts, [Matthew 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.4); [Matthew 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.6); [Matthew 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.18), and give a lively demonstration to all, that in exalting them to a participation of his glory, he acts agreeably to the immutable dictates of justice and equity, [Romans 2:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5-7). "righteous judgment."

Let the righteous then "set the Lord always before them, [Psalm 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.8). See also [Matthew 25:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-36); [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.46)." Let them "walk circumspectly," that they may not grieve him, [Exodus 23:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.20-21); and actively, that they may please him well in all things, [Colossians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.10); and, whatever difficulties they may have to contend with, let them proceed boldly, and "endure, as seeing him who is invisible, [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10); [Isaiah 41:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.13-14). [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27)."

#789

THE UPRIGHT ALONE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

**[Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8)**

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord;  
 but the prayer of the upright is his delight!"

The language of Scripture is often extraordinarily emphatic. This frequently arises from the strength of the metaphors that are used to express the mind of the writer; and frequently from his speaking of God in terms, which, in their strict sense, are applicable only to men. Of course, we are not to conceive of God as possessing either parts or passions; and when either the one or the other are ascribed to Him, we must regard it only as a condescension to our weakness, which is incapable of comprehending anything respecting God, except by a sort of comparison with him with man.

Of all his natural perfections, such as immensity and eternity, we know nothing at all; that is to say, our knowledge is merely abstract.

And respecting his moral perfections, as justice, mercy, truth, we know as little, except as we transfer to him the notions which we have formed of such perfections as exist in the human mind. We associate very distinct ideas with those attributes as applied to man; and by the help of those terms we express what we conceive to regulate the actions of God in the moral government of the universe.

In like manner, when we speak of anything being "an abomination" or "a delight" to God, we mean only that he will act in reference to that thing, as we would towards anything which excited such feelings in our minds. This anthropomorphic language is clearly understood by all. No man needs to be informed, that God is not susceptible of such feelings, or capable of those emotions which such feelings import; we therefore, in conformity with Scripture, shall proceed to speak of God in the same figurative language; and we pray God that your minds may be suitably impressed by it, while we consider,

I. The truths here asserted.

1. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord."

Where so strong an assertion is used in reference to any character, it is obvious, that we ought to understand very clearly and distinctly, who they are that are designated by that character. For instance, suppose that under this general term, "the wicked," we were to comprehend those only who are grossly and openly immoral, we should release all others from any participation in the feelings which the assertion respecting them is intended to create. But this we cannot do; for Solomon himself has accurately defined the character which he is here speaking of; and after defining it, has annexed to that very definition the same declaration as occurs in my text, "He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination! [Proverbs 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.9)."

You will observe then, that the wicked is one who is inattentive to the commands of God in his Word, and averse to comply with the requisitions of his Law and of his Gospel. Now such a one, even though he be guilty of no flagrant sins, is an abomination to the Lord. The rebellious state of his mind is most offensive to God; and therefore everything that he does is hateful to him, "A high look, and a proud heart, and even the plowing of the wicked, is sin! [Proverbs 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.4)." No act can be more innocent than that of plowing; but the most innocent acts of such a person participate in the guilt of his general state and habit of mind.

His most religious acts too are hateful to God; his very "sacrifices" are an abomination. In the first chapter of Isaiah's prophecies, the Jews are represented as bringing the offerings appointed by the Law, as bringing the best too, and in great number, and at the seasons ordained by God himself; and as accompanying those sacrifices with fervent prayer—and yet as being, at the same time, objects of God's utter abhorrence, because their conduct was altogether at variance with their professions! [Isaiah 1:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-13).

In another chapter he speaks of them as "taking delight in approaching to God," and as abounding in the self-denying exercises of fasting and prayer—and yet as altogether hateful in his sight! [Isaiah 58:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.2). The prophet Amos speaks strongly to the same effect in [Amos 5:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.21-23), "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps!"

To what an extent the services of such people are abhorred, God himself has told us in [Isaiah 66:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3-4), "But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations; so I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread. For when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, no one listened. They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me."

I beg you, brethren, to mark these expressions, and to apply them to yourselves while living in an unhumbled and unconverted state; for, "while you regard any iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear you! [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18). Your very prayers are turned into sin!

2. "But the prayer of the upright is God's delight".

"The upright" is he who truly and sincerely gives himself up to God, to be saved in his appointed way, and to serve him with a pure heart and mind. Of such a one God approves; and both his person and his services are accepted by him, "The prayer of such a one is God's delight." In itself it may be no more than a few broken accents, or a desire expressed only in sighs and groans; but it enters into the ears of the Lord Almighty, and shall be answered by him to the full extent of its import. It is, in reality, the voice of his own Spirit in the suppliant; and as "God knows the mind of the Spirit," so he cannot but delight in every petition that is dictated by him, [Romans 8:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26-27). Besides, in the prayer of the upright there are dispositions exercised, which are "in the sight of God of great price, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4)." The suppliant himself perhaps is mourning as though he could never hope for acceptance; but God listens to him with unspeakable delight; he loves "the prayer that goes not out of feigned lips, [Psalm 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.1);" above all, he delights in the prayer of the upright, because it gives scope for the exercise of love and mercy towards the poor suppliant, and for a rich communication of all spiritual blessings to his soul. God "will be inquired of by his people, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37)," before he will impart to them his promised blessings; and the moment they pray to him, he is like a mother that hears the cry of her beloved infant, whom she instantly presses to her bosom, and in administering to whose necessities she finds relief, as it were, to her own soul.

See this exemplified in his dealings with repenting Ephraim, "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](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18); [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20)." Here we see a true picture of what every upright soul shall experience. Let us only be "Israelites indeed, and without deceit, and our blessed Savior will see us under the fig-tree," or in our most secret retirements, and visit us in due season with the most endearing expressions of his love! [John 1:47-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47-51).

Such are the truths asserted in our text. We now proceed to suggest,

II. Some obvious deductions from the truths of the text.

From these truths it is evident:

1. That God's views of sin are widely different from those of men.

"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart!" [1 Samuel 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.7).

Men, if free from gross sin, imagine that they have little cause for self-reproach. They see no evil in the general course of this world; the pleasures, the gaieties, the amusements of it—are all accounted innocent by them; and if a man acts outwardly respectably in the different offices of social life, they think he has nothing to fear in the eternal world.

But "God's thoughts are widely different from theirs." We will suppose, for argument sake, that there is nothing flagrantly sinful in mirth, and a round of pleasurable amusements; yet inasmuch as such a state argues a departure of the soul from God, and strengthens its habit of rebellion against him—it is highly sinful; and should be so esteemed by all who would not deceive their own souls. For, if the very best actions of such people are hateful to God, if the very sacrifices with which they attempt to honor him are an abomination in his sight—then what must those actions be which have no respect to him, but which tend to banish him from their thoughts, and from the world?

I tell you, brethren, 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! [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)." You cannot be of the world and of Jesus Christ at the same time! [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16). "You cannot serve God and Mammon too [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24)." You may as well imagine light can have communion with darkness, and Christ with Belial, as that a person truly "upright" and believing, can find pleasure in the society of "the wicked" and unbelieving! [2 Corinthians 6:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-16). "The friendship of the world is" essentially, as well as constructively, a state of enmity against God! [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4)."

Whatever therefore may be pleaded in extenuation of those habits in which the more respectable part of the world are living, they are all, whether social or personal, civil or religious—one continued act of sin, as long as the soul continues alienated from God, and not altogether devoted to his fear. The man who thinks himself safe because he is in a path frequented by the great mass of his fellow-creatures, will find himself fearfully mistaken the moment he comes to the termination of it! [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14).

2. That the provisions of the Gospel are admirably suited to our necessities.

Here is "a wicked man;" he offers "a sacrifice" to his offended God; that very sacrifice is "an abomination to the Lord." Must the man then be left to perish? No! The Gospel reveals to him a sacrifice which is pleasing and acceptable to God, and which shall avail for the salvation of all who trust in it—even the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, who "presented himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)."

Again, Man, though originally made upright, has fallen, [Ecclesiastes 7:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.29), and become utterly averse to God and his law, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7). As for creating himself anew, he can no more do it than he could create himself at first. Must he then perish? No; the Gospel proclaims to him a promise from almighty God, that "he will give him a new heart, and renew a right spirit within him, [Ezekiel 36:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26-27);" so that, as the most guilty may be forgiven through Christ's atonement—so the most polluted may be "transformed into the very image of his God in righteousness and true holiness! [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)." Thus may any truly repentant man be accepted and as happy as the angels that have never sinned.

O! brethren, when will you study this blessed Gospel? When will you search into it, to find a remedy for your diseases, and a supply for your needs? Behold it is "a fountain opened," and ever flowing for the relief of sinful man; and every sinner in the universe is invited to "come and drink of it without money and without price! [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3). [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39)." I would that you should no longer be "an abomination" to your God! I would that he should look upon you with "delight," yes, that he should "rejoice over you with joy, and rest in his love, and joy over you with singing! [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17)."

3. That by the heart, and not by the mere external acts, will God form his estimate of us in the last day.

I know that our actions will be brought into judgment, and be adduced as evidences of our state before God, and as grounds of the sentence that shall be passed upon us. But it is not merely as acts that they will be either rewarded or punished—but as evidences of the real state of our souls.

Even in human judicatories the object inquired into is, the intent of the mind. It is malice that leads to murder; where that did not exist, the act of killing is not accounted murder; but where that manifestly did exist, there the attempt to kill, though unsuccessful, has the penalty of murder attached to it.

In the same way, at the bar of judgment, the sacrifices of a wicked man, however numerous or costly they were, will be regarded as of no value; while the mere sighing of an upright soul shall not lose its reward.

Let that then which is chiefly marked by God, be chiefly attended to by us.

Let us endeavor to get our "hearts right before God."

Let us remember, that, whether evidenced by overt acts or not, God can discern its real state; for "he searches the heart and tries the thoughts! [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.10)." "To him all things are naked and opened! [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13);" as the sacrifices of old, when flayed and cut open, were to the eye of the priest who inspected them. "Hell and destruction are before him; how much more then the hearts of men! verse 11." "He weighs the motives, [Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.2)," and discerns exactly how much there is of every different motive that may operate to the production of every act.

Watch, therefore, and examine carefully the state of your own hearts; and as "he requires truth in the inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6)"—then cease not to pray day and night, that, being "perfect and upright before him," you may have:  
light in darkness, [Psalm 112:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.4),  
peace in death, [Psalm 37:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.37),  
and glory in eternity! [Psalm 140:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 140.13).

#790

INSTRUCTION TO BE OBEYED

**[Proverbs 15:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.32)**

"He who refuses instruction, despises his own soul!"

The Scriptures speak plainly, and represent things as they really are. Perhaps there is no man that would acknowledge he despised God; yet God lays that sin to the charge of all who question his retributive justice, "Why does the wicked despise God, while he says in his heart, You will not require it! [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13)." So none would confess that they "despise their own souls;" yet that is the real character of all who refuse the instruction which God sends to them by his written word, and by the ministration of his faithful servants. And this will appear, if we consider,

I. The **need** that every man has of divine instruction.

Much may be known to man from reflection; he may gather much from observation and experience, and the mere force of reasoning, without any revelation from Heaven; but without divine instruction:

1. Fallen man can never know the extent of his needs.

He cannot know his fall in Adam, or the depravity of his fallen nature, or his utter incapacity to restore himself to God's favor. If told that "his carnal mind is enmity against God," and that "without Christ he can do nothing," and that God alone can give him either to will or to do anything agreeable to the divine command—he would think it all a libel upon human nature. It is scripture revelation alone that can give him any just views on these subjects.

2. Fallen man can never know how his needs are to be supplied.

Who could ever have thought that God himself should become incarnate, and live and die for the express purpose of supplying the necessities of his fallen creatures? Who could ever have imagined that God's righteousness should be imputed to man? and that the Spirit of the living God should ever dwell in man, for the purpose of revealing the Savior to him, and of imparting to him the divine image? A man not instructed in these things can know nothing about them. They are all matters of pure scripture revelation, and directly contrary to those methods of salvation which uninstructed man would have adopted for himself.

3. Fallen man can never avail himself of those offers which God has made to him in the Gospel.

In the Holy Scriptures are contained "exceeding great and precious promises," yes, promises confirmed by an oath, and ratified by an everlasting covenant. These promises relate to every need of fallen man, and make over to him a supply of every need by the simple exercise of faith on the part of man. How can the unenlightened man obtain a saving interest in these? How is it possible for him to lay hold of them, and rest upon them, and plead them before God—when he has never been instructed in relation to them? It is obvious that without divine instruction, sinful man must forever lie under the guilt and power of his sins, and endure the punishment due to his unrepented and unpardoned transgressions.

II. How dreadful must the state of that man be, who refuses divine instruction!

We use by no means too strong an expression, if we say, "He despises his own soul."

1. He grievously underrates his soul's **value**.

Who can estimate the value of an immortal soul, a soul capable of knowing, honoring, and enjoying the Most High God; and actually assured of that honor, if only he obtains the knowledge of Christ, and repose all its confidence in him? But, to judge of the soul's value aright, we must take into account the love that God has borne towards it, and the price which our adorable Lord and Savior has paid for its redemption. Contemplate the soul's nature and its capacity, its estimation by God, and its eternal destinies—and then say whether the man who refuses the instruction whereby he is to be made eternally blessed, does not altogether betray an ignorance of its true value?

2. He shamefully disregards his soul's best **interests**.

Without an attention to the concerns of the soul, it is in vain to hope that it can ever be happy in the eternal world. The man that refuses divine instruction, does in reality inflict upon his soul the heaviest judgment that it can sustain in this life! He says, in effect: "Let me alone, that I may go on to increase my guilt, and "treasure up for myself wrath against the day of wrath!"

What would be thought of a man who should so trifle with his temporal interests? Would there be any term of reproach too harsh or too contemptuous whereby to designate so foolish a character? What, then, must we say of a man who so neglects the interests of his soul?

3. He casts his soul away for mere trifles!

Give to sensual gratifications all the importance you will, they are only as the small dust upon the balance when weighed against the soul. Yet for these does the man who refuses instruction sell his soul. Truly, if Esau "despised his birthright," when he "sold it for a bowl of stew, [Genesis 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 25.34)," then much more do they pour contempt upon their own souls, who, for any consideration whatever, abandon all reasonable hopes of Heaven, and subject themselves to the infliction of everlasting misery in Hell.

ADDRESS.

1. Avail yourselves now of the opportunities that are afforded to you.

There has been declared unto you from time to time, so far as I have been enabled to declare it, "the whole counsel of God." Think what improvement you have made of these instructions; and what will be your reflections in the eternal world, if you reject them! [Proverbs 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.12-13). Indeed, while disregarding the instructions given to you, you greatly "wrong your own souls," and act as people that are "in love with death, [Proverbs 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.36)." O that you may be wise before it is too late! For, "If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from Heaven? [Hebrews 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.25)."

2. "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves! **[James 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.22)**."

If the Scriptures abide only in the head, they will be of no profit. To be really useful, they must descend into your hearts, and operate in your lives! Our blessed Lord's warning upon this subject deserves your deepest attention. I would have you not only wise, but "wise unto salvation." I would not have you erect a house upon the sand; and that, after all your labor, it should fall upon your heads, and crush you; but rather, that you should build your house upon a rock, and find it able to shelter you from all the storms and tempests that ever can assault it! [Matthew 7:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.24-27). This will show that "you have real love to your soul, [Proverbs 19:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.8);" and richly shall you "be recompensed at the resurrection of the just! [Proverbs 8:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.33-35)."

#791

MAN'S ESTIMATE OF HIMSELF AND GOD'S CONTRASTED

**[Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.2)**

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weighs the spirits." (KJV)

"All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD." (NIV)

Among the purest joys of a Christian is "the testimony of a good conscience;" and all the labor that can possibly be bestowed on the attainment of it will be well repaid by the acquisition. But we must not forget, that man is a fallen creature, and that his mind and conscience partake of the defilement which sin has brought upon all the faculties of his soul, [Titus 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.15). Hence it is necessary to try even the verdict of conscience itself, and not to trust too implicitly to its representations. To "put evil for good, and good for evil; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; darkness for light, and light for darkness"—is, alas! but too common, and more especially in forming an estimate of our own character and conduct. So has Solomon informed us in the words which we have just read; from which we shall take occasion to show,

I. Why it is that men have such an arrogant confidence respecting the rectitude of their own ways.

We can know little of mankind, if we do not know that men of every character and every class go forward in their respective ways with a considerable measure of self-confidence and self-approbation; and, as Solomon elsewhere observes, that "every way of a man is right in his own eyes! [Proverbs 21:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.2)." Now whence does this arise? How is it that all, notwithstanding the vast difference there is in their habits and conduct—yet think themselves right? We apprehend that it arises from hence:

1. They judge themselves by a wrong standard.

Every man has a standard of his own, suited to the views and habits of the class among whom he moves.

Some allow themselves in a very great latitude, both of principle and practice; and never condemn themselves, unless they grossly violate the code that is established among their own particular associates; they are "pure in their own eyes," as long as they keep within the bounds of morality which their own friends prescribe.

Others are far more strict, as Paul in his unconverted state was. "As touching the righteousness of the law, he was, in his own estimation, blameless;" so blameless, as to be quite sure of his acceptance before God, "I was alive without the law once." His very zeal, which was so hateful in the sight of God, and so directly pointed against the Lord Jesus Christ himself, furnished him with an occasion for nothing but self-applause. Though he did not altogether lay aside the law of God in forming his estimate, he used it only to confirm his own delusions, limiting its injunctions to the mere letter, instead of entering into its spiritual import.

None but the truly enlightened Christian brings himself fairly to the test of God's holy law; all others have a defective standard; a standard of their own, fitted for their own ways; and this is the first great source of the delusion specified in our text.

2. They turn their eyes from the sinful things in their own character.

Men, if they suspect that all is not right, are very averse to a strict examination of their case; they content themselves with looking at one side of the question only. Whatever tends to justify their conduct, is dwelt upon with pleasure; but whatever tends to cast a shadow upon it, is passed over in silence, "they hate the light, and will not come fairly to it, lest their deeds should be reproved."

This is very observable in the conduct of the Apostles, when our Lord touched upon their mutual contentions about worldly preference and distinction; they instantly shifted off the blame, by turning the discourse to another subject, [Luke 9:46-49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.46-49). This is a true picture this of the generality of men, not excepting those of whom better things might be hoped!

3. They use all possible artifices to obtain a favorable testimony from their own conscience.

Many are not ashamed to justify what yet they know in their consciences to be wrong: "It was expedient; it was even necessary under existing circumstances; they were constrained to it, and could not do otherwise."

It was in this way that Saul justified his impious intrusion into the priestly office. He cast the blame on Samuel, for not coming as early as he had expected; and affirmed, that, however contrary to the divine law his conduct had been, it was expedient, and necessary, and good; since the Philistines would otherwise have come upon him, before he had sought by proper offerings the protection of God, [1 Samuel 13:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 13.8-12). But notwithstanding all his subtle arguments, Samuel told him plainly, that he had "done foolishly," and grievously provoked the Lord to anger! [1 Samuel 13:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 13.13-14).

If they do not proceed in their self-vindication to this extent—yet they will excuse what they cannot justify: "True, it was not altogether right; but they were compelled to do it; and the fault was rather in others than in them. It was done in haste, and without due consideration. It was a mistake; or was done to prevent a greater evil; or to answer some valuable end."

Here again we may see in the same unhappy monarch the evil we are speaking of. Saul had spared Agag, and the best of the flocks and herds, which he should have utterly destroyed; yet, when he saw Samuel, he boasted that "he had fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." But, on Samuel's inquiry into the reasons of the flocks and herds being spared, he excused himself by saying that he had reserved them for sacrifices; and, when further reproved, he cast the blame on the people, asserting, that they had taken of the spoil without his consent, [1 Samuel 15:13-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.13-21).

When their conduct is too plainly reprehensible to admit of such replies, they will then palliate what they cannot excuse. Satan will never leave them at a loss for something whereby to extenuate their faults, and to silence the reproaches of a guilty conscience: "It was not so bad as is represented; the intention was good; it was done only once, and that under circumstances that might well account for it."

But there is no end to the suggestions of self-love. There is not a man on earth, except the broken-hearted penitent, who will acknowledge his faults in all their real malignity, and with all their attendant aggravations. All will cast some veil over their ways to hide their deformity, and to make them appear innocent, and will put such a construction even on their basest actions, as to leave in them scarcely any fault at all.

But, while we thus varnish over our own ways, so as to make them pure in our own eyes, it is of infinite importance for us to know,

II. How God will form his estimate of us.

Certainly he will not judge as we do. He will scrutinize our actions more narrowly, and will weigh as in a balance everything that pertains to them.

1. God will weigh our **actions**.

Everything we do is put, as it were, into a balance, even "the balance of the sanctuary." God will examine with infallible accuracy what the motives were, and the principles by which we were actuated; for by these, and not by the mere external appearance, must the quality of our actions be determined. He will examine:  
how much there was of love to his name;  
how much of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ;  
how much of humility, of self-denial, of love to our fellow-creatures;  
and how much of zeal for the honor and glory of our God.

Precisely according to the measure of these things will be his estimate of our actions; all else will be only as dross that is blended with the gold, and which the fire will consume.

2. God will weigh our **excuses**.

These, for the most part, when put into his scales are found lighter than the dust upon the balance. By means of them we impose upon ourselves, and upon our fellow-creatures; but we cannot impose on him, as "he cannot be deceived." The very excuses which we urge with such confidence, will be rejected by him with scorn. See how strongly he has cautioned us on this head. He supposes us to have made some rash vow, and then to excuse ourselves from performing it, by saying that we were under a mistake, "It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. 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 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.5-6)."

It is on this account that we so often meet with this warning, "Let no man deceive you with vain words!" "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked!" In truth, so far are we from satisfying God by our vain pleas, that the more confident we are of the validity of our own excuses, the more we provoke his wrath and indignation, "You say, 'I am innocent; he is not angry with me.' But I will pass judgment on you because you say, 'I have not sinned.' [Jeremiah 2:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.35)."

3. God will weigh the **dispositions and habits of our minds**.

It is not so much transient acts which determines our character, as the rooted habit of the mind. This we are apt to overlook; and if we see not any glaring faults in our conduct, we think that all is well with us. But God views us as creatures, who by the very law of our creation are bound not to live to ourselves, but unto him. He views us too as redeemed creatures, who, having been bought with the precious blood of his dear Son, are bound by this further tie to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his." By this test he will try us; and according to the result of this scrutiny he will determine our eternal state.

In particular, he will mark what degree of honesty there is in us while examining our own ways; and what is our predominant feeling: a partial desire to think our "ways pure," or an impartial desire to find out every atom of impurity that adheres to them. He will further notice what means we are using to ascertain the truth, and to escape from all kinds of self-delusion; whether we honestly consult others who are more impartial than we can be supposed to be; and whether we are crying mightily to Him to search and try us.

Both of these are necessary; because, while, on the one hand, we may too easily rest in the favorable opinion of friends, we may, on the other hand, be determinately holding fast our confidence against the judgment of friends, even while we are pretending to ask counsel of our God. Truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked!" and one of the principal dispositions that God will expect to see in us is, a holy jealousy over ourselves, and a willingness rather to die than be left under a mistaken confidence of our own purity. Where this is lacking, there is a radical defect in the character; a defect which, if not rectified, will exclude us from the number of true Israelites, whose character is, that "they are without deceit."

ADDRESS.

1. The careless worldling.

You will not believe that you are wrong. But consult the Scriptures, and see. Find, if you can, one single word that sanctions a life of spiritual carelessness and indifference. To what purpose is it to be saying, "Peace, peace! when there is no peace?" Did you never hear what God replies to those who say, "I shall have peace, though I walk after the imaginations of my heart?" "The Lord, it is said, will not spare that man; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against him; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him; and the Lord shall blot out his name from under Heaven! [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20)."

Go on, if you are determined to do so; but know, that "whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap; he who sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he who sows to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting! [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

2. The self-righteous moralist.

Solomon justly observes, "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)." And such is the character of those whom we are now addressing. They are ready to say, "I have kept all the commandments from my youth up; and what do I lack?" But, like that deluded youth, they lack the one thing needful, namely, "to forsake all, and follow Christ." This they do not; this they will not do; they hold fast their own righteousness, and will not renounce it for a saving interest in Christ's righteousness. Such was Paul in his unconverted state; but when his eyes were opened to see the plan of Salvation revealed in the Gospel, then "he counted all things but dung and dross that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, but Christ's." Know then, brethren, that, if you trust in the law, you shall be tried by the law, and suffer all its penalties for your infractions of it; but if you will embrace the Gospel, and seek for acceptance solely through the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall find that "in him you shall be justified, and in him shall you glory!"

3. The professed believer.

Much blindness yet remains within us after we have believed in Christ; and the most eminent believer still needs to maintain a godly jealousy over his own deceitful heart. The Apostles themselves at one time "knew not what manner of spirit they were of." But where shall we find any among ourselves that suspect this to be their own case?

Alas! we all are more or less blinded by self-love! And, when most confident of our own integrity, we still need to say with Paul, "I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he who judges me is the Lord! 1 Corinthians 4:4." We entreat you to guard with all possible care against the delusions of your own hearts; for they will assuredly, if persisted in, betray you to your everlasting ruin. The express declaration of God on this subject is, "If you say, (in reference to any duty neglected, or sin committed,) Behold, we knew it not; does not he who ponders the heart consider it? and he who keeps your soul, does not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works, [Proverbs 24:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.11-12)." Yes; His estimate will not be regulated by your opinion of yourselves, but by his perfect knowledge of your real character. May God enable us so to lay these things to heart, and so to act upon them, that "we may be found by him in that day without spot and blameless!"

#792

TRUSTING IN GOD

**[Proverbs 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.3)**

"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

We all believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, and in a general way acknowledge his agency in the government of the world; but his particular care of us individually, we find it extremely difficult to imagine. This, however, is most clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures; and our duty is so to realize it, as, under all circumstances of trial and of difficulty, to look to him for his gracious interposition, and to expect from his hands whatever shall most conduce to our real benefit.

In the words before us we see,

I. A state supposed.

"Commit to the LORD whatever you do!"

It is here supposed that we may be in a state of great perplexity, so as not to know what to do for the best. This is often the case with nations, especially when threatened by a potent enemy [Isaiah 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.2) and [Joel 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.6); [Joel 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.10). Nor is there scarcely an individual to be found, who does not, at some time or other, experience an oppression of mind, arising out of difficulties with which he has to contend, and troubles which he knows not how to avert. Even in relation to men's spiritual concerns, the same trials are felt. Many, in a season of deep conviction, have poured out their complaints like Israel of old, Isaiah 59, from the middle of verse 9. to 12. And many, under grievous temptation, have been reduced to the desponding frame of David, [Psalm 77:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.6-9). At such times their thoughts are altogether distracted; and they are, like the people so beautifully described in the 107th Psalm, brought, as it were, "to their wit's end."

But in all such cases there is abundant consolation, if only we use,

II. The remedy prescribed.

"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

The remedy is both simple in itself, and invariably efficacious, "Commit to the LORD whatever you do."

Believing that God both knows your trials, and is willing to afford you the help you need, carry them to him, and spread them before him, as Hezekiah did the letter of blaspheming Rabshakeh, [Isaiah 37:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.14). Then plead his promises, which are so "exceeding great and precious;" and "roll on him your entire burden, assured that "he will sustain you, [Psalm 55:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.22)," and accomplish your most enlarged desires, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10). This is the direction given to every living man, [Psalm 37:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.5).

In the performance of this duty you will find effectual relief.

Nothing can be more fluctuating than the thoughts of men, especially in seasons of great trouble. But the very instant we commit our works to God, "our thoughts" become composed, and peaceful, and "established." God has taught us to expect this, [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7) and [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3); and to what an extent he fulfills his Word, we may see in Hezekiah; who, from a state of the most extreme distress, was filled in an instant with the liveliest joy and most confident exultation, [Isaiah 37:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.3); [Isaiah 37:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.22); [Isaiah 37:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.33). See also [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3).

Observe, then, with humble and adoring gratitude,

1. How exalted are the privileges of the true Christian!

It is your privilege, brethren, to be "without anxiety, [1 Corinthians 7:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.32)," both in relation to your temporal concerns, [Matthew 6:25-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.25-34), and even in respect to your immortal souls, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12). All your care, whether for the one and the other, should "be cast on God, who cares for you, [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7)." Then, though you will have many trials to bear, you shall be able to say with Paul, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed! 2 Corinthians 4:8-9." Be your trials what they may, "you shall be more than conquerors over all."

2. How marvelous is the condescension of our God!

From low thoughts of God, we are apt to fear that he will not exert himself for us. But he will attend to us, if we trust in him, as much as if there were not another creature in Heaven or on earth to attract his notice! Nor is it in great things only that he will interpose for us, but in the smallest that can possibly be imagined. In fact, there is nothing great or small with him; nor indeed is there anything small as it respects us.

Let anyone see in Scripture what good arose from the accidental opening of some national records by King Ahasuerus, or what evil arose from David's accidental glance at Bathsheba, and we shall see that we need the divine care in everything; and in everything it shall be afforded us, if only we commit our ways to God, and place all our confidence in him. Not so much as a hair shall fall from the head of any of his saints, but according to his all-wise appointment; nor any circumstance occur which shall not be overruled for their everlasting good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

#793

THE BENEFIT OF EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION

**[Proverbs 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.23)**

"The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips." KJV

"A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction." NIV

The depths of human science can be explored by few, because few have either leisure or ability for learned investigations. The same observation is true with respect to theology also, considered as a science; a very considerable knowledge both of history and ancient languages is required, in order to a full understanding of the various branches of sacred literature. But the spiritual and most essential parts of divine knowledge are totally distinct from these subjects; nor is that species of learning, which the educated only can possess, at all necessary for the obtaining of a clear and accurate acquaintance with them.

There are two books, if we may so speak, and two alone, which we need to know; and they are, the Bible and our own hearts. Until our own hearts are opened to our view, the scriptures will be only "a sealed book;" but a discovery of our own hearts will throw an astonishing light upon the sacred oracles; and make innumerable passages, which once seemed obscure and inexplicable, so plain, that "he who runs may read" and understand them. To this effect Solomon speaks in the words before us; in elucidating which we shall inquire:

I. Who are here meant by "the wise?"

Solomon certainly did not intend to limit his assertion to those who were possessed of literary attainments.

Human knowledge, when sanctified by grace, is a valuable instrument in the hands of its possessor, inasmuch as it will qualify him for discharging many duties, which, without it, he would not be able to fulfill. Moses, by being "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," was better fitted to stand forth as the deliverer of Israel. And Paul, notwithstanding he declined using "the words of man's wisdom," was the better furnished for his work by his learned education, and his uncommon proficiency in the studies of his age and nation. Nevertheless it is not such learning that will form our minds to true wisdom. On the contrary, if unsanctified, it will be as contrary to scriptural religion as even the most inveterate lusts would be. The more we have of it, the more will "the things of the spirit appear foolishness unto us;" and the greater will be our backwardness to seek that spiritual "discernment" which alone can qualify us to judge of them aright, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14); and it is on this very account that God so often pours contempt upon it and confounds it, [1 Corinthians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.19-20).

Nor was it of people eminent for **worldly prudence** that Solomon spoke.

There can be no doubt but that true wisdom will make us prudent, for the voice of inspiration says, "I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence, [Proverbs 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.12)." But there are many who are "prudent in their own sight," and in the eyes of the world, who are considered by God as altogether destitute of wisdom! [Isaiah 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.21). The Rich Man, who had so judiciously cultivated his grounds as to obtain large crops, and who, to preserve the produce, enlarged his storehouses, would have been accounted prudent by the world; but God gave him most deservedly the appellation of a fool, "You fool! this night shall your soul be required of you! [Luke 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.20)."

The people characterized in the text as wise, are those who are endued with **heavenly wisdom**.

Some there are, whose "eyes have been enlightened" by the Spirit of God, and whose hearts are regulated by his living oracles. They have been taught by God to know their own state, and have been formed to a disposition and character suited to their real character, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18). These are the wise, the only wise in the sight of God. And they are truly wise, even though they should be the most illiterate upon earth. We do not hesitate to say that the unlearned fishermen of Galilee, (the apostles) possessed more true wisdom than all the heathen philosophers that ever existed.

Their superiority to others will soon appear, if we inquire,

II. What are those subjects of which they are so well able to speak?

Their spiritual views do not at all qualify them to speak on matters of science and philosophy. But there are many things relating to Christian doctrine and experience, of which they can speak more truly, and more accurately, than any other people upon earth:

1. On the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart.

This is a subject with which they are well acquainted; nor are they afraid of declaring it in its full extent. They have found on a thousand occasions:  
how fatally their heart has deceived them,  
what false glosses their heart puts upon anything which it is desirous to retain,  
and what subtle pretexts their heart will suggest for rejecting anything that is distasteful to flesh and blood.

They have seen:  
the deep-rooted enmity of their hearts against God,  
their aversion to all holy exercises, and  
their proneness to do everything that was evil.

In speaking on these points, they speak not by hearsay, or according to a received system, but according to the Word of God, confirmed as it has been by their own experience. "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked!" [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9).

2. On the suitableness and excellency of the salvation provided for us.

They no more doubt that they need a Savior, or that the Savior provided for them is exactly such a one as they need, than they doubt their own existence. They know full well that they could not fulfill the law; they know also that Christ has satisfied all its demands by his obedience unto death; and that by believing in him they shall be savingly interested in all that he has done and suffered. They perceive that in this way of salvation, God gives all, and we receive all; and though the pride of their hearts formerly revolted at this, they are now disposed, not only to acquiesce in it, but to thank and adore God for so gracious a dispensation.

3. On the way in which sinners are brought to the knowledge of Christ.

Here they can point out, as in a map, the country which they themselves have traveled over. They have been convinced of sin; they have seen the refuges of lies which they fled to in succession, one after another, until God sent home the law in all its spirituality to their hearts. They have thus been made to despair of saving themselves, and have, like the wounded Israelites, looked simply to him who was lifted up upon the cross. And though there is a great variety in the experience of different people with respect to these things—yet these are the general outlines in which all true Christians are agreed; and therefore they can speak of them with truth and certainty.

4. On the nature of the spiritual warfare.

They are daily engaged in maintaining a conflict with sin and Satan. They have within them the two principles of flesh and spirit, which are continually struggling, as fire and water, to subdue each other, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17). They know the discouragements and fears with which the Christian is assailed, and the consolations and joys with which he is revived. Nor are they "ignorant of Satan's devices," having often "withstood his wiles," and "repelled his fiery darts." On these subjects their mouth is taught, and learning is added to their lips.

The world are often struck with this fact, and ask with amazement,

III. Whence is it that they have attained this knowledge?

Experience, under God, is the best teacher; and it is from experience that they know these things.

They derive not their knowledge from books; for many either cannot read, or never have studied the writings of men upon those subjects. Nor have they received their instructions from man; for though God taught them by man—yet God alone made the Word effectual to open their eyes; and the very truths, perhaps, which they had heard frequently before without any profit, are suddenly applied to their souls, and made the power of God to their conviction and salvation.

In short, it is not merely in their heads, but in their hearts that they know these things; and in speaking of them they can say with the apostle, "What our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard, and our hands have handled of the Word of life, the same we declare unto you."

Hence it is that their knowledge of these things is so superior to that of others.

Others cannot comprehend any one of the foregoing truths. If they should attempt to speak of them, they would only expose their own ignorance. Yes, though they may write well on the theory of religion, they are totally in the dark with respect to the nature of Christian experience. The poorest and lowest of God's people have incomparably greater penetration in these things than the wisest philosopher! This is plainly declared by the Apostle, "He who is spiritual judges all things; yet he himself is judged by no man, [1 Corinthians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.15)." It is confirmed also by that expression of Solomon, "The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor man that has understanding searches him out, [Proverbs 28:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.11);" that is, discovers his ignorance, and is able to rectify his errors. As a man who has experienced any great pleasure or pain has a juster idea of what he has felt, than another has who only speaks of such things by hearsay; so, in a far higher degree, has the experienced Christian a clearer insight than others into divine truths, because he has the archetype and image of them in his own heart.

APPLICATION.

1. Let none attempt to excuse their ignorance by saying that they are no scholars.

Nothing is more common among the lower classes of mankind, than to offer this as an excuse for their ignorance. But such excuses are vain; God has told us that he has chosen the poor in preference to the rich and learned, [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-28), and that he has revealed to them what he has hidden from the wise and prudent, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25). Let the blind then pray that they may receive their sight; so shall they "understand all things, [Proverbs 28:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.5)," and be made "wise unto salvation, [2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15)."

2. Let us improve our conversation with each other for the purpose of spiritual edification.

Too apt are we to trifle away our precious hours. But the tongue of the wise is justly compared to choice silver that enriches, and to a tree of life that nourishes us with its precious fruits, [Proverbs 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.20). Our words, if rightly ordered, might "administer grace" to each other. Let us then endeavor to obtain "the tongue of the learned, that can speak a word in season unto him who is weary, [Isaiah 50:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.4)." Thus, we may "speak profitably out of the abundance of our hearts," and approve ourselves truly "wise by winning souls" to God, [Proverbs 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.30).

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ERRONEOUS VIEWS OF RELIGION REFUTED

**[Proverbs 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.25)**

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." KJV

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death!" NIV

The testimony of an inspired prophet respecting the human heart is, that it "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked!" This testimony, as far as it respects the world at large, we all are ready to confirm. We see that in the great mass of mankind there is a propensity to deceive, not others only—but themselves also. They are often unconscious of principles by which they are manifestly actuated; and as often take credit to themselves for virtues which they do not really possess. People who have made considerable attainments in self-knowledge, are yet by no means free from this infirmity; the Apostles themselves, on more occasions than one, betrayed by their conduct, that "they knew not what spirit they were of." Nor does this proneness to self-deceit discover itself only in relation to individual acts, wherein men may be supposed to be biased either by their interests or passions; it extends itself to men's whole character, and leads them to form a most erroneous judgment of their state; it leads them to:  
"call evil good, and good evil;  
 to put darkness for light, and light for darkness;  
 to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

But it may be thought, that, if a man is deceived by his own heart, a less degree of criminality will attach to his actions, and he will have less reason to apprehend the displeasure of God. This however is not true; for we are responsible to God for the judgment we form of good and evil; and if we err, after all the means of information he has given us, we must be willingly deceived, and abide the consequences of our folly. To this effect Solomon speaks in the words before us; he concedes that "a way may appear right to a man;" but he tells us, nevertheless, that "the end thereof will be death."

This assertion of his is not to be understood of one particular way only; it is a general assertion that is applicable to a great variety of cases; or rather, I should say, to every kind of way that is followed by man and condemned by God. Of course we cannot enter into all the cases which might be specified; it will be sufficient to notice two or three ways, which are the most commonly followed, and most fatal in their outcome.

I. The first way to which we would call your attention is that of mirthful licentiousness.

We cannot suppose any person so ignorant as really to think that licentious gaiety is right; but there are millions who do not think it materially wrong. Criminal excesses and indulgences are palliated by the mild appellations of conviviality and youthful indiscretion; and they are deemed necessary to the well-being of society. They are even made subjects of boasting; and people who through age and infirmity are disabled from pursuing their former courses, will yet repeat them in effect, by glorying in the remembrance of them, and encouraging others in the same career.

So far from condemning these things in their minds, the generality will laugh at those who are scrupulous enough to doubt the lawfulness of such courses; and if anyone were bold enough to bear a decisive testimony against them, he would instantly be characterized by some opprobrious name. To suppose that such indulgences, if restrained within moderate bounds, would subject a man to the wrath of Almighty God, would be considered as bordering on insanity; and every one is encouraged to regard such innocent liberties (as they are called) as perfectly compatible with a well-grounded hope of salvation.

Let us then inquire what foundation there is for such a confidence. Does God say anything in his Word respecting the outcome of such ways? Or does God speak of them in the same gentle terms? No! not a syllable of this kind is to be found in all the sacred records. A general caution is given to us by Solomon in reference to carnal indulgences of every kind, "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see—but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment! [Ecclesiastes 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.9)."

The general warning given by Paul is plainer still, "If you live after the flesh, you shall die! [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13)." Lest we should mistake his meaning, he frequently enumerates the works of the flesh, "Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God! [Galatians 5:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.19-21)."

But because men are ready to offer vain pleas and excuses for such things, he particularly guards us against laying the smallest stress on any surmises of our own, or any suggestions of others, "Let no man," says he, "deceive you with vain words; for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience! [Ephesians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.6)."

Moses, and after him the Prophet Jeremiah, meet the case in the most pointed terms, "It shall come to pass," says Moses, "when a man shall hear the words of this curse, and shall bless himself in his heart, saying: I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of my heart; the Lord will not spare him; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man; and all the curses that are written in this book shall come upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under Heaven! [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19)."

Now permit me to ask, For what end are these things written? Is it merely to alarm and terrify us? Can we conceive that God would falsify, in order to keep us within some decent bounds? Is there any necessity for him to resort to such an expedient; or could he do it in consistency with his own perfections?

Here then we are reduced to this dilemma: either to believe that the Word of God is full of the most palpable falsehoods from one end to the other—or to acknowledge that the confidence of ungodly men is unfounded, and their hope delusive. Choose the former alternative if you please; but you must excuse me if I embrace the latter. Believing as I do the Word of God to be true, I must believe, and must exhort you also to believe, that they who make light of sin "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The drunkard, the swearer, the whoremonger, in short the careless sinner, may "think his ways right;" but, if there is any truth in the Word of God, they shall end in death. The express declaration of God concerning them is, "The end of those things is death! [Romans 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.21)."

II. The next way to which I would call your attention, is that of proud unbelief.

Associated with loose morality will be found, for the most part, a contemptuous disregard of the Gospel. Ungodly men feel no need of it; they see no excellency in it; they consider it as unworthy of their attention; and they leave it as a proper field for the discussion of disputants, or the contemplation of wild enthusiasts.

If any urge the necessity of faith in Christ, they either contend, that, having been educated in the beliefs of Christianity, they have all the faith that is necessary; or they cut the matter short, and tell us in a word, "His faith cannot be wrong, whose life is in the right." As to the idea of their salvation depending on the exercise of faith, they cannot for one moment endure it; nothing is too bad to be spoken of so preposterous an opinion; and all who maintain such a sentiment are set down as deceiving hypocrites, or as gloomy fanatics.

Thus confident are they that their way is right.

But what says the Scripture to these things? Does God himself lay no stress on the exercise of faith? Does he leave us at liberty to embrace or reject his Gospel as we please? Having given us his only-begotten Son to die for us, and set him forth to be an atoning sacrifice for sin through faith in his blood—does he attach no guilt to unbelief? Does he represent the despisers of his Son as in the same predicament with those who receive him? Nothing of this kind can be found in all the book of God. It may be called candor; but there is no such candor in the inspired volume. The Scripture calls everything by its proper name, and assigns to everything its proper character; and the unbelief which is thought a matter of so much indifference by the world at large, is declared to be the infallible source of ruin to all who indulge it.

But let the Scriptures speak for themselves, "He who believes on Christ is not condemned; but he who believes not, is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." "He who believes on the Son, has everlasting life; but he who believes not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." In conformity with these declarations is the whole tenor of sacred writ, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," says our Lord, "no man comes unto the Father but by me." "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden! and I will give you rest." "You will not come unto me, that you might have life."

To the same effect is the testimony of his Apostles, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "There is no salvation in any other; there is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ!"

What now shall we say to these things? Is there any difficulty in understanding these passages? I know, it is fashionable with many to represent the doctrines of the Gospel as so abstruse and intricate, that no one of common discernment can understand them. But what intricacy is there above, which the most unlettered man in the universe may not understand? Men may invent subtleties on any subject; and on this among the rest; but there is nothing here which is not plain and easy to the most common apprehension. Christ has made an atonement for our sins; and he calls us to seek salvation through his blood and righteousness. He tells us, that "having no sin of his own, he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God m him." And when he sent his disciples to go and preach this Gospel to every creature, he added, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, and he who believes not shall be damned."

What shall we say then? Shall we believe what the Lord Jesus Christ has so strongly affirmed? Or shall we believe the surmises of ungodly men, and "make God a liar?" Even if there were no such strong assertions to guide us, our own reason might tell us, that God, after having given his only dear Son to die for us, would never leave it a matter of indifference whether we believed in him or not; but when we find the testimonies of Scripture so plain and so express on the subject, we must conclude that the unbelief which men so proudly and impiously justify, will issue in the everlasting confusion of those who indulge it.

III. The last way to which we shall direct your attention, is that of cold formality.

Many who have respect for the Gospel as a system, content themselves with yielding to it a bare notional assent; and persuade themselves that they receive it aright, even though they never are stimulated by it to any extraordinary exertions. As for all that zeal and love and diligence in the service of the Lord Jesus which they behold in some few around them—they account it all a needless preciseness; and they impute it, for the most part, to ostentation or vanity in those who dare to maintain it. To be regular in their attendance on public worship, to fulfill the duties of their station, and to do unto others as they would be done unto—this is enough for them, and more than this they utterly despise. Speak not to them of loving God, of living by faith on the Lord Jesus, of maintaining fellowship with him in the exercise of prayer and praise. Speak not to them of walking as Christ walked, of bearing the cross after him, and of rejoicing that they are counted worthy to suffer for him. Speak not to them of receiving out of his fullness, of living to his glory, or of growing up into his image; such ideas are quite foreign to their minds; they sound only as the reveries of an over-heated imagination; to aspire after such things would be to be legalistic. If such exertions were necessary for the attainment of Heaven, what must become of all the world? Their religion lies in a much narrower space; they do as they would be done unto, and they mind their proper business in life; if this will not save them, nothing will; and they have no fear but that, when they shall have finished their course. God will say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servants! Enter into the joy of your Lord."

But if these views of a Christian's duty are right, whence is it that the Christian course is represented in Scripture as so arduous, that the most "righteous people are scarcely saved," and with great difficulty? Why is it that the divine life is compared to a race, that calls for such exertion: a wrestling, that requires such skill; a warfare, that is attended with such labor and danger? What is there, in the kind of life which has been described, that at all corresponds with such images as these? If the way to Heaven be so easy that people can walk in it without any material difficulty—then why is it that our Lord has represented the path of religion as strait and unfrequented, and has bidden us to strive to enter in at the strait gate, because many seek to enter in, and are not able?

Paul, when enumerating many classes of ungodly people who would arise in the latter days, mentions those who have "a form of godliness without the power;" and in those very words describes the characters which we are now considering. The people of whom we are speaking, particularly value themselves upon their moderation in religion; as though it were a virtue to love God moderately; to serve our Lord and Savior moderately; and to seek the salvation of our souls moderately. This was the religion of the Laodicean Church; they determined to guard against all extremes; they would not neglect the service of God altogether; nor would they, on the other hand, engage in it with all their might. And what says God unto them? Does he commend this boasted moderation? No! He says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot! So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth!"

Let me not be understood as though I would vindicate anything that was really wild enthusiasm; God forbid! The only thing for which I am contending is, that God is to be served, not in a cold, lifeless, formal manner, but with sincere delight, and with all the powers and faculties of our souls. We must "yield ourselves as living sacrifices to him;" we must endeavor to "walk worthy of him;" and strive to the uttermost to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." This is the holiness to which we are to attain; and "without this holiness no man shall see the Lord!"

Having specified some of those ways which seem right to the generality of men, but will assuredly end in death, namely, the ways:  
of mirthful licentiousness,  
of proud unbelief,  
of cold formality,  
we would entreat you to contemplate the state of those who walk in them, at that period when they are about to be undeceived.

While they are in health, and the world smiles upon them, their religion, such as it is, will suffice; and their confidence will bear them up. But when sickness comes, and they draw near to the chambers of death, a doubt will frequently arise in their minds, whether they are prepared to meet of God. To dispel these thoughts, they betake themselves to business or pleasure or company, or perhaps to strong drink; but in spite of all the means used to allay their fears, their suspicions will recur with greater force, and excite a wish to know the opinion of someone better informed than themselves; but they are afraid to suggest their doubts, lest they should create an alarm in the minds of others, and impress them with an unfavorable apprehension of their state. The recurrence of these thoughts makes them cling to life; not that life is pleasant to them; but they are afraid to die. Compelled at last by inward uneasiness, they perhaps put to some friend a question respecting the evidences of our acceptance with God.

They are then answered in the most confident manner, that, as they have done no harm, and have been very attentive to their duties in life—they have no cause of fear. The satisfaction founded on such an answer as this, soon passes away; and their former fears return. Now perhaps they would be glad to see some person, whose piety they have hitherto ridiculed as needless preciseness; but they are afraid, lest a conversation with him should confirm, rather than remove, their doubts and fears. They wish, but cannot make up their minds, to send for him. Perhaps they suggest the idea to their attendant, but are dissuaded from encouraging it; they are told with increasing confidence, that all is well with them. Perhaps they persevere in their wishes, and a faithful monitor is sent for. The servant of God deals tenderly with them, but at the same time points out the errors they have fallen into, and the importance of seeking salvation in another way. This disquiets them for a time, and makes them doubly earnest about their souls. The faithful monitor repeats his visit; but the officious friends have barred the door against him; or perhaps have persuaded the dying man to decline all further interviews, and to venture his soul upon his own delusions. Any excuse is offered; the dying man is asleep, or too ill to see anyone; and thus the only remaining hope for the poor man is banished. Such consolations as are founded on error and presumption are administered to the last; and at length the disembodied spirit rushes unprepared into the presence of its God!

But who can conceive the surprise and horror of the soul at the instant of its separation from the body? Methinks it shrinks back, wishing if possible to hide itself in its former tenement of clay. But the time is come for it to be undeceived.

Now it sees the weakness and futility of all its former hopes.

Now it sees how erroneous were its views of sin, and its conceptions of saving religion.

Now it sees that the teachings which God had given in his Word were true.

The self-deceiver now can no longer doubt to what an end his former ways were leading, or where they will come who follow the paths he trod. To indulge a wish for another period of probation, or even for the smallest mitigation of his misery, now are vain. Gladly would he go back for a moment to the world he has left, to warn his surviving friends, lest they also come into the same place of torment; but that cannot be admitted. The sacred volume is given them for their guide; and if they will follow their own delusions in preference to it, they must abide the consequences. Now despair and anguish seize hold upon him; and he is delivered up a prey to all those horrors, which once he ridiculed as idle tales.

Would we avoid this awful end, let us turn from the paths that lead to it. Let us remember, that the assertions of men, however confident—are of no value any further than they are founded on the Word of God. Do not let their light thoughts of sin lead us to tamper with it, or to doubt its outcome. Do not let their excuses for rejecting Christ prevail on us to neglect his great salvation. Rather, let us embrace him, and glory in him, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart. Do not let their standard of religion be ours. Let us go "unto the Word and to the testimony." Let us see how Christ and his Apostles walked; and though we are ridiculed as precise and enthusiasts—let us persevere in following the path of duty. Let us "stand," as the prophet speaks, "and ask for the good old way, and walk therein."

Let us seek instruction wherever we can find it; and let us remember, that the broad and frequented path is, according to our Lord's express declaration, a way that leads to destruction; but that the path to life is narrow, difficult, and unfrequented; for "few there be that find it."

In short, let us look forward to the end of our journey. At that we shall soon arrive; and then it will be of no consequence whether we have been honored for keeping the world in favor, or despised for putting them to shame. The only thing that will then be of any consequence, will be, whether we are approved of our God. Let this end then be kept in view; let us regulate our ways in reference to it; and let us both by precept and example endeavor to undeceive the world around us. Then shall we be blessings to the generation in which we live, and shall attain that glory which ought to be the one object of our constant pursuit.

#795

GOD IS THE DISPOSER OF ALL EVENTS

**[Proverbs 16:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.33)**

"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord!" (KJV)

"We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall!" (NLT)

Though we would not be unnecessarily fastidious in condemning the use of any particular term, where we knew that in its popular sense it was not very exceptionable—yet we cannot altogether approve the use of such terms as 'luck' and 'chance' and 'accident,' for though we know that the people who adopt those kind of expressions do not intend to deny the doctrine of a superintending Divine Providence—yet we cannot but think that such language tends exceedingly to weaken a sense of God's Providence upon the soul, inasmuch as it excludes his agency from the affairs of men, and regards them as left to mere and absolute chance. With the Scriptures in our hands, we are perfectly assured, that all things, however casual or contingent with respect to man, are under the control of a Superintending Providence; or, as it is said in our text, that, "when a lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord."

In confirmation of this truth, we shall show:

I. That God is the disposer of all events.

Events, of whatever kind they are, are equally under the direction of Almighty God. He disposes of,

1. God regulates those things which are most **dependent on human agency**.

In the government of kingdoms all the powers of the human mind are called forth and concentrated; but the time for their commencement and continuance is altogether under the direction of God's power, [Daniel 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.17); [Daniel 4:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.35). The success of all human plans, whether relating to military enterprises, [1 Samuel 17:45-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.45-47). [2 Chronicles 20:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.17), or commercial speculations, [Deuteronomy 8:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.17-18), or agricultural pursuits, [Haggai 1:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 1.6-11), or matters of inferior moment and of daily occurrence, [Proverbs 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.21). [1 Samuel 2:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.6-9)—depends entirely on God. It was he who directed to Ahab's heart the bow drawn at a venture, and to Goliath's forehead the stone out of David's sling. In a word, he "works all things after the counsel of his own will! [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11);" and "his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his good pleasure! [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.10)."

2. God regulates those things that are most **independent of human agency**.

Nothing has less dependence on human skill or foresight than a lot. As far as respects the determining of that, an idiot is on a par with the wisest man in the universe. But the lot is entirely at God's disposal; as all who acknowledge the existence of a Deity have confessed, by resorting to it on emergencies which nothing else could determine. Saul, and all the people of Israel, resorted to it, in order to learn from God who it was that had displeased him; and again, to determine the same matter between Saul and Jonathan his son, [1 Samuel 14:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 14.40-42). In like manner the Apostles had recourse to it, in order to know whom God willed to be the successor of Judas in the Apostolic office, [Acts 1:23-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.23-26). Even the heathens themselves had a persuasion, that, when matters were solemnly referred to Him in a way of lot, he would make known to them the point which they wished to ascertain, [Jonah 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.7). But as in these instances the event, though supposed to have been directed of God, might have been casual, since the chances against it were not very great, we will adduce one, which marks beyond all possibility of doubt the Divine interposition. Since, in the language of chances, it was above a million to one that the lot did not fall on the person to whom God infallibly directed it, [Joshua 7:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.14-18). There were two million people; but the last lot fell to Achan. Here is a striking illustration of that passage, "Evil shall hunt the wicked man to overthrow him! [Psalm 140:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 140.11)." The hounds see not their prey in the first instance, but trace it by its scent, and follow it with certainty in all its turnings, until at last they come in sight of it, and overtake it, and destroy it. So it was in regard to this pursuit of the man who had troubled the camp of Israel; the lot fell on the right tribe, then on the right family of that tribe, then, on the right household, and lastly on the right individual in that household: and to every human being it speaks in this awful language, "Be sure your sin will find you out!"

That we may see how important a truth this is in a practical view, we shall proceed to show,

II. That in this character god is constantly to be regarded by us.

1. We should trace God's hand and his will in everything that is **past**.

Have we been loaded with benefits? they must be received as from Him, "from whom comes every good and perfect gift." It matters nothing whether our blessings came to us by inheritance, or were the fruit of our own industry; to God, and to God alone, must they be referred, as their proper source! 1 Chronicles 29:14. Have we, on the other hand, been visited with afflictions? We should know that "they did not spring out of the ground," but proceeded from God's gracious hand; since "there is no evil in the city, but the Lord himself has done it." Thus Job viewed all his diversified trials; he overlooked the second causes, and fixed his eyes on God alone, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away."

Now in all this we see the great importance of tracing everything to the Lord; for by our blessings we are inflamed to gratitude, and by our troubles are softened to submission.

2. We should trace God's hand and his will in everything that is **future**.

If nothing can occur without his special appointment, how safely may we commit to him our every concern; and how confidently may we expect a happy outcome of every occurrence! Can we do better than leave ourselves at his disposal? Were it possible that he should err, or that, having devised anything, he should be unable to accomplish it; or that, having begun to accomplish it, he should, through versatility, change his purpose, and alter his dispensations; we might then not feel so well satisfied with having everything subject to his disposal; but when infinite wisdom and goodness concur to direct all our concerns, and infinite power also engages to overrule everything for our good, we may well dismiss every fear, saying with the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him."

We may be as composed as Hezekiah was when surrounded by Sennacherib's army, [2 Chronicles 32:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.7-8), or as Elisha, when surrounded by the army of the king of Syria, [2 Kings 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.16-17). "Having God for us," we may rest assured, that "none can effectually be against us."

Let us see from hence,

1. The excellency of faith.

This is the principle which, far beyond any other, honors and glorifies God. By faith we are prepared to receive everything as from him, and to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems him good." Mere reason, though it may acknowledge these truths, can never enable us to realize them; but "by faith we see Him who is invisible;" and learn to acknowledge him, as much "in the falling of a sparrow," as in the ruin of an empire! Seek then this blessed principle; yes, seek it in its highest and noblest exercises, that "being strong in faith, you may give glory to God."

2. The blessedness of the true believer.

Whatever confederacies may be against you, it is your privilege to know, that "no weapon that has been formed against you can prosper." God has said, that "all things shall work together for your good;" and they shall do so, however much you may be at a loss to conceive in what way the good shall be elicited. Only take care that "Christ is yours;" and then you may be sure that all things else are yours! [1 Corinthians 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-23). If Christ is yours, all the attributes of God are so far yours, that they shall all be exercised for your good. Having "Christ for your sanctuary," you shall be inaccessible to the fiery darts of Satan; and having "your life hidden with Christ in God, you shall, at his second coming, assuredly appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)."

#796

THE NAME OF THE LORD A STRONG TOWER

**[Proverbs 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.10)**

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower;  
 the righteous runs into it, and is safe!"

In the Proverbs of Solomon we must not expect to find long and accurate statements of Divine truth, nor elevated strains of devotion founded upon it. The scope of the book is rather by brief sentences to fix upon the mind truths already acknowledged, and to show the excellency of them in their effects.

The passage before us is very instructive in this view, namely, as illustrating the blessedness attendant on true piety. But it commends itself to us yet more forcibly, by exhibiting a contrast between the dispositions and habits which true religion inspires, and those which are indulged by the whole ungodly world.

The text informs us what "the righteous man" does; the verse following our text informs us what the worldling does.

The one makes God his refuge.

The other trusts in his wealth, or some other equally vain idol.

The one founds all his hopes on God, as made known to us in the Scriptures of Truth; the other founds all his hopes on some vanity, that has no title to confidence but "in his own conceit."

It was to mark this contrast that the blessedness mentioned in our text was confined to "the righteous." Solomon did not mean to intimate, that an unrighteous man, if he would flee to this tower, would be shut out; for the most unrighteous man in the universe is invited to come to it; and, like the cities of refuge, its gates stand open day and night for the admission of all who desire to flee to it for refuge.

But the truth is, that none but the righteous will run to it; none but they who are sensible of their guilt and danger, and are fleeing in earnest from the wrath to come, will enter in. All others deny the necessity of submitting to so humiliating a measure; they think they are safe enough without it. The believing penitent, on the contrary, is thankful for such a refuge, and is in the habit of running to it on every occasion; and therefore to him, and to him alone, is the security confined.

To elucidate the passage, we will endeavor to unfold,

I. The character of God.

By "the name of the Lord" we are not to understand the mere word, Jehovah, as though that would afford us any security. This is a vain and foolish superstition, that has no foundation whatever in the Oracles of God. But, by "the name of the Lord" we must understand his character; as we learn from that expression of David, "Those who know your name," that is, your character, "will put their trust in you! [Psalm 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.10)."

1. Consider the character of Jehovah, as described by himself.

God, in infinite condescension, was pleased to make himself known to Moses, and by an audible voice to "proclaim his name, [Exodus 34:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.5)." "The Lord passed by and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin—and who will by no means clear the guilty! [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7)."

Now we would ask the trembling sinner: What character he would wish Jehovah to bear? Would he wish God in no instance to testify his displeasure against sin, but to treat all men alike, putting no difference between "the guilty" who are going on in all manner of wickedness; and the penitent, who are turning from all iniquity? No! There is not a penitent in the universe that would wish God to act in a way so unworthy of his Divine Majesty. But if he desires to be assured of mercy to returning penitents, it is not possible that any words he could devise could more richly portray this attribute, than those which God himself has used. Consider them distinctly and separately, and see how constantly they have been verified towards you hitherto, and how abundantly they contain all that you can desire.

2. Consider the character of Jehovah, as revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

The Lord Jesus Christ is "Emmanuel, God with us;" and he is particularly called, "The image of the invisible God," because in him the whole character of God is made, as it were, visible to mortal men. He is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" and his whole character is marked in the name given him before he was conceived in the womb, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21); [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23). The name "Jesus" is the same with Joshua, or "Jehoshua," that is, Jah-Hosea, Divine Savior. What a glorious and comprehensive name is this! All that he has done and suffered for us, and all that he has promised to us—is contained in it; together with his perfect sufficiency for all that he has undertaken to effect. The trembling sinner finds in the very name of Jesus a pledge of all that he needs.

Besides, while we contemplate him in the whole of his work and offices, we are expressly authorized to apply to ourselves the benefit of them all, and to call him, "The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)." Follow this idea in all its bearings, and what unsearchable mysteries of love and mercy will it unfold to our view!

Such being the name and character of God, let us contemplate,

II. The interest we have in the name of the Lord.

The name of the Lord is indeed "a strong tower".

Consider every perfection of God; there is not one which is not "a chamber where we may hide ourselves until every calamity is past! [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20)." The wisdom, the goodness, the love, the power, the faithfulness of Jehovah—who that is encompassed by them does not feel himself in an impregnable fortress? Truly they are not merely a wall, but "a wall of fire" round about the righteous; of fire, which while it protects the fugitive, will devour the assailant.

What a tower too is the Lord Jesus Christ in the whole of his work and offices! Well is he said to be "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, etc. [Isaiah 26:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.4)." Yes, "the man" Christ Jesus, in his Mediatorial character, is such "a hiding-place! [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2)," where no adversary shall "ever penetrate."

All who run to it are **safe**.

Who shall ever approach "to harm" those who are thus protected? [1 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13). Surely "they shall be kept in perfect peace."

They are safe from the curses of the broken law; for "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus! [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1)."

They are safe too from the assaults of Satan; for "their lives are hidden with Christ in God," where Satan can never come! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4).

In a word, they are safe from every kind of evil; for God has said of those who make the Most High their habitation, that "no evil shall befall them, [Psalm 91:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-10)."

The persecutor may touch their body, but cannot reach their soul [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5).

They shall sooner be fed with ravens, than be allowed to "lack any manner of thing that is good, [Psalm 34:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.9-10)."

And if anything occur that has the semblance of evil, they may be assured that it shall work for their present and eternal good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

Like Elisha, they are surrounded with horses of fire and chariots of fire! 2 Kings 6:14-17; and any assaults made upon them shall only terminate as in Elijah's case, with the confusion and ruin of their enemies, [2 Kings 1:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.9-14).

"Suffer now a word of exhortation".

1. Study much the character of God.

"To know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, is," as our Lord informs us, "eternal life!" All other knowledge is mere vanity in comparison with this. Without this we have nothing to warrant our hopes, or to dissipate our fears, "Acquaint then yourselves with God, and be at peace!"

2. Maintain constant and intimate communion with God.

You know how a child runs to his parent on every occasion; do you in like manner run unto your God. This is the very character of the true Christian, "The righteous runs unto God as his strong tower." Go to him under every fear, and every want, and every distress; and "cast your care on Him who cares for you!"

3. Assure yourselves of the safety which you are privileged to enjoy.

Well may you say, "If God is for me, then who can be against me?" See how David exulted in his security, [Psalm 18:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.1-2); [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1); and learn like him to glory in your God; for it is God's desire that you should enjoy all possible consolation, [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18). Your Savior has assured you, that "none shall pluck you out of his hands;" lie there then in peace and safety, "knowing in whom you have believed, and that he is able to keep that which you have committed to him!" When he has lost his power to save, then, and not until then, shall any enemy prevail against you.

#797

A WOUNDED SPIRIT

**[Proverbs 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.14)**

"The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;  
 but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

Man being placed in a world where troubles of various kinds continually await him, he is endued with a firmness of mind suited to the occasion, so that he is enabled to bear them with a considerable measure of composure and ease. Previously to the arrival of afflictions, they appear more formidable than they really are. We should suppose that poverty, and sickness, and pain, and losses of friends and relatives—would produce a permanent depression of mind; but this is not found to be the case; time soon heals the wounds that are inflicted by them; and habit soon reconciles men to the burdens which they are called to sustain. Where piety is superadded to natural fortitude, and the grace of God is in full activity, a man can support any load, however heavy.

What an accumulated weight of afflictions came on Job! yet he not only blessed God for them, but, when his wife urged him to renounce his allegiance to God on account of these visitations, he, with wonderful composure, answered, "Shall we receive good at the Lord's hands—and shall we not receive evil?"

Yet there are bounds beyond which a man cannot go, without almost miraculous assistance. The spirit, like the body, may be borne down by a weight beyond its strength; and when the spirit, which ought to support a man under all his other trials, is itself broken, he must fall of course.

Now there are many things which inflict so deep a wound upon the spirit, as to destroy all its energy, and incapacitate it for its proper office; and that we may provide an antidote against them, and afford some consolation under them, we will,

I. Consider the case of a wounded spirit.

1. A spirit may be deeply wounded **by despondency of mind**.

The mind may be disordered, as well as the body—and indeed through the medium of the body; and it is certain that there are disorders which so operate upon the nerves as to weaken and depress the physical spirits, and to sink a man into the very depths of despondency. This is often mistaken for religious melancholy; but it frequently has nothing to do with religion; it is found in people who never turned their minds at all to the subject of religion; and, as it comes with, and by, a bodily disease—so it ceases with the removal of that disease.

But in its effect it is inexpressibly painful, unfitting people for every duty, indisposing them for all the proper means of relief, and leading them to put away from themselves all manner of consolation. They constrain their kindest friends to apply to themselves that proverb. "As vinegar poured into a wound, so is he who sings songs to a heavy heart! [Proverbs 25:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.20)."

2. A spirit may be deeply wounded **by great and long-continued afflictions**.

Job himself, who had so nobly sustained all his complicated afflictions, sank at last, and cursed the day of his birth. Nor is it at all uncommon for men of the greatest fortitude thus to sink. To produce this, is the tendency of calamities of any kind, personal, domestic, or public. See the Apostle's caution to the Church of Corinth respecting their conduct towards a member whom they had excommunicated from among them. As they had been formerly too backward to punish his offence, so now they were too backward to restore him; on which occasion Paul says to them, "You ought rather to forgive him, and to comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with sorrow! [2 Corinthians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.7)."

Here the grief was purely personal; but in Jacob it was of a domestic nature. He had, in his own apprehension, lost his favorite son, Joseph; and now he was afraid of losing Benjamin also; that, he said, would fill up the number of his sorrows, and "bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave! [Genesis 42:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.38); [Genesis 44:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 44.31)."

How many at this day have ground to adopt this complaint, in reference to their children! Public calamities, it is true, do not so often press with an unsupportable weight upon the mind; yet have we several instances of their depressing, almost to the lowest ebb of sorrow, people of the strongest and the holiest minds.

How were Moses and Joshua discouraged, when unexpected circumstances arose to render doubtful the ultimate success of their mission, [Exodus 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.22-23). [Joshua 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.7-8).

Nor was it a love of life, or a fear of death, that made Hezekiah so extremely dejected at the prospect of his approaching dissolution, but an apprehension of the evils that would accrue to his country in the event of his removal; and that one consideration reduced him to such a state of grief as would in any other view have been utterly unworthy of him as a saint of God, [Isaiah 38:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.13-14).

3. A spirit may be deeply wounded **by guilt upon the conscience**.

What terrible effects did this produce on the mind of the traitor Judas! He could not retain the wages of his iniquity, nor bear his own existence; but sought in suicide a termination of the sorrows he could no longer endure! [Matthew 27:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.3-5).

Nor is it at all uncommon for people who once "made a mock of sin," to feel so bitterly the torments of an accusing conscience, as to be driven by them to habits of intoxication, and even to suicide itself, as a refuge.

Even Christian men, previous to their having received a renewed sense of God's pardoning love upon their souls, have been brought to such terrors and despondency, as to find within their own souls a foretaste of Hell itself. David's experience in this particular is a just, but lamentable, exhibition of this painful truth, [Psalm 31:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.9-10); [Psalm 38:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-8); [Psalm 40:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.12).

4. A spirit may be deeply wounded **by violent temptations**.

Satan, though he can no longer possess the bodies of men as formerly he did, has yet great power over their souls. "His fiery darts" can inflict the deadliest wound!

Paul himself was not able to endure "the buffetings" of that malignant enemy, until, by repeated cries to his Divine Master, he had obtained from him augmented supplies of grace and strength, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7); [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

As for Job, though he was a perfect man—yet he sank entirely under the assaults of this great adversary, [Job 6:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 6.2-4); [Job 7:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.2-4); [Job 7:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.13-16).

Even the Lord of Glory himself, when he had assumed our feeble nature, was so exhausted in his first conflicts with Satan, that he needed to have "angels sent from Heaven to strengthen him, [Matthew 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.11)." And in his last hours, when all the powers of darkness made their united assault upon him, he was constrained to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."

What wonder then if Christians of ordinary stature be on some occasions unable to bear up under the wounds which he inflicts upon them?

5. A spirit may be deeply wounded **by spiritual desertion**.

This, after all, is the most overwhelming to a pious soul. With the presence of his God a man may bear anything; but when "God hides his face from him, he must of necessity be troubled, [Psalm 30:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.6-7)."

In this respect also, David shows us what an insupportable affliction this is, and how impossible it is for the strongest or most pious mind to endure it, [Psalm 77:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.2-4); [Psalm 88:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.3-7); [Psalm 88:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.11-16).

But in our blessed Lord himself we see the most awful exemplification of this truth; for when all his other afflictions together had not been able to extort from him one complaint, this forced from him that heart-rending cry, "My God! my God! why have you forsaken me? [Matthew 27:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.16).

Seeing then that many may be fainting under the agonies of "a wounded spirit," we will:

II. Administer some balm for the relief of a wounded spirit.

There is no wound that can be inflicted on the soul in this life, which may not, by an application of the proper remedies, be healed. Consider then,

1. There is no affliction which is not sent by God for our good.

Afflictions, of whatever kind they are, "do not spring out of the ground!" They are all appointed by God, in number, weight, and measure, and duration. If it is disease of body, it is he who inflicts the wound. If the trial comes from any other quarter, it still is God's chastening rod that strikes us, with a view to our spiritual good, "that we may be made partakers of his holiness." Convictions of sin are the work of his Spirit, to prepare us for the final restoration of his favor; and Satan himself, as in the case of Job and of Peter, is restrained by God, so as ultimately to display the triumphs of divine grace, and to benefit the souls which he endeavors to destroy. And God himself, in the hidings of his face, seeks only so to humble and purify our souls as to prepare us for the fuller manifestations of his love and mercy, [Isaiah 54:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-8).

Now it must be granted, "that afflictions are not for the present joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards they work the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." "If we are in heaviness through the suffering of many kinds of trials," God sees that there is "a needs be" for them, [1 Peter 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6). By putting us into the furnace, we shall be purged from our dross, and come out of it as vessels better fitted for his service! [Malachi 3:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.2-3).

Well therefore may the consideration of the end for which afflictions are sent, and of the benefit to be derived from them, reconcile us to the difficulty of them, and dispose us to patiently wait for the removal of them. Could Job have foreseen the outcome of his troubles, they would have been deprived of more than half their weight.

2. Our afflictions, of whatever kind they are, will endure but a little time.

The Apostle speaks of all, even the heaviest afflictions, as light and momentary, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17). Even life itself is but as a shadow that declines; or a weaver's shuttle, which soon finishes the piece that is to be severed from the loom. And when once this frail life is ended, there is an everlasting termination of all our sorrows! Every genuine believer enters immediately into "his presence, where is fullness of joy for evermore." Into that blissful world, nothing that is afflictive can ever enter to disturb their peace! "God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever! [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4)."

And, as no created evil can then impair their bliss, so no created good can add to it, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp! [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)."

How little will the transient clouds that once occasioned a momentary gloom be remembered, when our dwelling is forever fixed in the full splendor of the Sun of Righteousness. Surely we need not be much cast down at trials, however painful to flesh and blood, when we consider that their duration is but as the twinkling of an eye, and that they will so soon terminate in inconceivable and everlasting felicity!

3. There is in Christ a full sufficiency for every wound.

We need not go to the eternal world for consolation; for we may find it here. What says the Prophet Jeremiah? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? [Jeremiah 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.22)." Did we but cry to Jesus, as Paul did, we would find "his grace abundantly sufficient for us." "If we cast our burden upon him, he would sustain us."

See the experiment tried by David, and the account which he gives of the result; how soon was he "taken out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and a new song was put into his mouth, even praise unto our God! [Psalm 40:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.2-3)."

The very office which our blessed Lord undertook, was that, not of a Redeemer only, but of a Comforter, "to comfort those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness [Isaiah 61:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.2-3)."

Let all then look unto him, whatever their affliction now is; even though, like David, they were under the depths of dereliction, they shall soon, with him, have occasion to 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)."

The Lord Jesus "will not break a bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax—but will bring forth judgment unto victory;" and, if we confide in him, "our heaviness may indeed continue for a night, but joy shall come in the morning!"

#798

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE MOST DESIRABLE

**[Proverbs 19:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.2)**

"Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth." KJV

"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way." NIV

There is nothing so highly prized as knowledge. No pains are deemed too great for the acquirement of it; no expense too large. Knowledge is that which, more than anything else, raises a man in public estimation, and gives him influence in the world. There is, however, a knowledge which is far from being duly appreciated; I mean, that which relates to the concerns of the soul. Yet is this, beyond all comparison, more important than the other. For this, Paul counted all things but as dross and dung. Without the attainment of human sciences, a man may be both holy and happy.

I. Without divine knowledge, a man can have **no directory for his ways**.

Reason is very inadequate to guide our steps. Without Scripture, we know not how to walk and to please God. The wisest of heathen philosophers were but blind conductors in the paths of real holiness; they understood not what holiness was. Of humility, which is the very foundation of holiness, they had no just ideas.

So it is with unenlightened professors of religion. They see little beyond forms and external duties. The exercise of spiritual affections is beyond their attainment or their aim. Of an entire superiority to the world, and a total surrender of themselves to God—they have no conception; unless, indeed, it is in a way of monastic institutions, where the duties of social life are overlooked, and form is substituted in the place of vital power. Of a life of faith in particular, a person uninstructed in the Gospel can have no proper views. Being ignorant of Christ, he cannot see what a fullness there is in him of wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption; or what necessity there is for the sinner to receive supplies from it, by the daily exercises of faith and prayer.

In a word, from a man ignorant of the Gospel, everything that constitutes vital godliness is concealed! He has:  
no higher principle than that of fear;  
no better standard than that of heathen morals;  
no nobler end than that of saving his own soul, whereas out true end is to glorify God.

As for being constrained by the love of God, or aspiring to a full conformity to the divine image, or living altogether for the glory of God—he knows it not; yes, he regards it rather as fanciful, enthusiastic, impractical, and absurd. Not feeling his obligations to his Redeemer, he lacks the entire spring of vital godliness, and can rise no higher than to the low attainment of heathen morals! Tell me then whether he is not in a truly pitiable state!

II. Without divine knowledge, a man can have no remedy for his sins.

Every man feels himself to be a sinner, and to stand in need of forgiveness with God. But a man ignorant of the Gospel, seeks remission only in a round of duties consistent with human reason.

He sees nothing of his need of a Mediator, through whose obedience unto death he is to obtain acceptance with God.

He knows nothing of "the fountain which was opened for sin upon" the cross; and therefore he cannot wash in it.

He knows nothing of a righteousness wrought out for him; and therefore he cannot clothe himself with it.

The great and precious promises which God has given us in his Word, have, in his mind, but little weight, little reality. His repentances, his reformations, his works of charity, these form his chief dependence in order to be saved, and these administer to him his principal consolation. Hence he never acquires any solid peace. He always has a secret misgiving that he has not obtained peace with God; and he has no conception of what is meant by "the joy of faith."

The true believer "rejoices in the Lord with joy unspeakable and full of glory." But to this, the poor blind moralist can never attain; and therefore he can never enter into "the glorious liberty of the children of God." In what a lamentable condition then is he!

III. Without divine knowledge, a man can have no divine support in his troubles.

"Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." But to those who have sincerely received the Gospel, there are consolations that bear them up above all their afflictions.

They know from whence all their trials spring, even from the hand of God himself.

They see them to be the fruit of a Father's love, sent for the production of the most gracious ends.

They feel within themselves the humbling, sanctifying efficacy of afflictions.

They perceive that their trials are instrumental to the carrying on of God's work within them, and to the augmenting of that weight of glory which shall be accorded to them at the last day.

But of all this, the man who is uninstructed in the Gospel is altogether ignorant. He has little except the principles of philosophy for his support. He feels that he cannot ward off affliction; and that to repine under it, is only to augment its pressure; and that, consequently, patience is his truest wisdom, But to "glory in tribulation," and be thankful for it, and "take pleasure in it"—are attainments of which he has no conception, Truly "to be thus ignorant, it is not good."

IV. Without divine knowledge, a man can have no strength for his duties.

An unenlightened man, of necessity engages in duty depending only on his own strength. He knows nothing of what union with Christ is; or what is that vital energy which is derived from him, as from a vine to its branches, or from the head to the members of a body. Nor is he acquainted with the operations of the Holy Spirit, so as to be "strengthened with all might by the Spirit in his inward man."

In consequence of this, if he goes forth to mortify sin, or conflict with Satan, or engage in any spiritual duty, he fails, and is ready to consider success as utterly unattainable. Being a stranger to "the mighty working of God's power, which wrought in Christ to raise him from the dead, and to set him above all the principalities and powers whether of Heaven or Hell," he conceives that similar conquests are not to be expected by mortal man; and that to rise thus superior to sin and Satan, is an object to be desired rather than attained.

Hence he satisfies himself with the poor performances of outward duty; and never dreams of being "changed into the image of the Lord Jesus, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of his God." "Through the strength of Christ he might do all things;" but, being ignorant of Christ, he is left to his own resources, and "can do nothing." Say, brethren, whether in this view also he does not fearfully illustrate the truth contained in my text.

V. Without divine knowledge, a man can have no true hope in the time of death.

At the approach of death, an unenlightened man is in a truly pitiable state. He has no other hope but what is founded on his own works, and a persuasion that he has done his duty to the utmost of his power. As for an assurance of faith, or a spirit of adoption enabling him to cry Abba, Father! he knows not of it; nor can imagine how it is that some attain such joy in the prospect of eternity.

Of the covenant of grace, and of all its blessed provisions, he, alas! is ignorant. He cannot take hold of the promises of the Gospel, or rely on the faithfulness of God. He sees not how a title to Heaven may be attained, or with what confidence it may be pleaded at the throne of grace. He sees not Christ as his forerunner, that is gone to prepare a place for him, and has engaged to come and take him to himself. Hence he clings to life even to the last; and never reckons death among his treasures, or accounts it gain to die.

Paul well describes the state of such a one; that being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish his own righteousness, and not submitting himself to the righteousness of God, he perishes at last under the guilt of all his sins. Whatever his exertions are in the pursuit of righteousness, he fails, "because he seeks it by works, and not by faith alone; for he stumbles at that stumbling-stone, [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-33); [Romans 10:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.2-3);" and thus, as God has said, "he is destroyed for lack of knowledge, [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.6)." The unhappy man living all his days "without Christ," dies at last "without hope, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)." Who will doubt now the truth of Solomon's assertion, that for the soul to be without knowledge, is the greatest calamity that can befall a man on this side of the grave!

And now, brethren, what shall I say unto you?

1. Seek to pity those who are in ignorance of the truth of Christ.

You would surely pity your friends and relatives, if they were physically or mentally disabled. Yet they are still greater objects of pity, if they are ignorant of the Gospel! In what an awful state are those who have:  
no directory for their ways,  
no remedy for their sins,  
no support in their troubles,  
no strength for their duties, and  
no hope in their end!

Yet this is indeed, the condition of all who are ignorant of Christ! They may be endued with human wisdom, and may be placed on the highest pinnacle of human glory; but yet a poor Lazarus, who is destitute of all that man values, is happier than they. Consider this, I beg you, and exert yourselves to the utmost of your power for the bringing of their souls to God; and pity the heathen world, who are yet sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Pity also God's ancient people, who have yet a veil upon their hearts, and who still reject that Savior whom their fathers crucified. Join in in all the evangelistic methods that are used for the enlightening of this benighted world; and if you see, indeed, that "for immortal souls to be without knowledge is not good," address yourselves with all energy to the dispelling of the darkness that reigns throughout the world, and to the "turning of men universally from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

2. Seek to improve the means of grace which are afforded you.

Permit me to say, that you have the light set before you, and "the whole counsel of God faithfully declared unto you." Do not then trifle with the opportunities which you enjoy. They are sent of God to "make you wise unto salvation;" and, if they are disregarded, they will greatly augment both your guilt and condemnation.

In truth, if you had not such instructions, your guilt would be comparatively light, and your condemnation would be more tolerable. But, with your advantages, your state will be worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, if you make not a suitable improvement of them. In attending on divine ordinances, learn to regard them as Bethesda's Pool, where, unless the waters are stirred, you will attend in vain; and beg of God to accompany them with power from on high, and to give them a saving efficacy to your souls!

3. Seek to make a good use of the knowledge which you possess.

Be careful that you do not "hold the truth in unrighteousness." The servant who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, was beaten with more and heavier stripes, than he who erred through ignorance. And you may be sure that if the Lord Jesus Christ will be revealed at last in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that knew not God, and obeyed not the Gospel; much more will he take vengeance on those who have trodden under foot his blood, and done despite to his Spirit of grace!

If God has shined into your hearts, to give you the light of his Gospel, you must walk as children of the light and of the day. It is only in this way that you can show the excellency of the Gospel, or convince the world that the knowledge you possess is of any real value.

But, to make this improvement of the Gospel, much consideration will be necessary. The word of Christ must be treasured up in your minds, and must "dwell in you richly in all wisdom." A mariner who will not consult his compass will derive no benefit from it; nor will you, if you do not take "the Word as a light unto your feet and a lantern to your paths." Solomon, in the words following my text, justly says, "He who hastens with his feet, sins;" and so I say to you: If you will have your way acceptable unto God, you must apply to him constantly for fresh supplies of his grace, and must "take heed unto your ways according to his Word."

#799

THE SINFULNESS OF MURMURING AGAINST GOD

**[Proverbs 19:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.3)**

"The foolishness of man perverts his way, and his heart frets against the Lord." KJV

"A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD!" NIV

The wickedness of the heart is deep and unsearchable. Those who do not watch its motions, have no idea of its depravity; but they who diligently examine it may discover many evils, and by the light of God's Word attain considerable knowledge. The disposition mentioned in the text deserves special attention.

I. We will illustrate the disposition here spoken of.

1. The careless and ungodly world are ever ready to cast blame on God, on account of their **sins**.

They give the rein to every evil thought and desire;  
they expose themselves to every kind of temptation;  
they lay innumerable stumbling-blocks in their own way;  
and thus become enslaved by vicious lusts and appetites!

Against these iniquities God denounces his judgment. But the slaves of sin continue hardened in their evil ways; they condemn even God himself us the author of their sins. This was the conduct of Adam immediately after the fall, [Genesis 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.12). He decidedly condemns God for giving the woman to him—and this is too often imitated by his guilty descendants.

2. The careless and ungodly world are ever ready to cast blame on God, on account of their **sorrows**.

Sorrow is entailed on all as the punishment of the first transgression; but most of the afflictions which men suffer are brought on them by their own folly.

For example, some involve themselves in sorrow through sloth or intemperance.

Others ruin themselves by imprudence and extravagance.

Others bring themselves into difficulties by their sinful actions and habits which they form.

But under all their calamities, they "murmur against the Lord." They are full of invectives against those that have been the more immediate occasions of their trouble! [Numbers 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.11); [Numbers 16:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.41).

They consider their lot as hard and severe; and thus do they reflect on God's Providence rather than on themselves. Cain, the first-born of Adam, indulged this malignant spirit [Genesis 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.13-14); nor are there any sons of sorrow who do not more or less follow his example.

Nor are believers themselves wholly free from this murmuring disposition.

They watch and pray against their besetting sin—yet are sometimes brought under the power of it. On these occasions they are tempted to murmur against the Lord; they are ready to expostulate with him like those of old, [Isaiah 58:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.3); they forget how justly they might have been eternally forsaken; and that the remaining power of their sins is the consequence both of former habits, and of present neglects. Under afflictions also they feel too much proneness to murmur. What sinful impatience did the holy Elijah manifest! [1 Kings 19:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.4). Even Job himself manifested a murmuring character! [Job 7:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.15-16).

This murmuring disposition however, is most hateful in the sight of God!

II. We will point out the **evil** of murmuring against God.

Murmuring against God manifests the most **deplorable ignorance**.

God is not, nor can be, the author of sin. He maintains in all things the character given of him, [Deuteronomy 32:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.4); hence James shows the folly of casting blame on God, [James 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.13-14); nor can God punish any of us more than our iniquities deserve; hence the expostulation of the prophet is unanswerable, [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39). Besides, to murmur against God is not the way to concern him in our behalf, nor will it tend to the peace and composure of our own spirits. It is as unprofitable to us as it is unjust towards him. True wisdom would teach us to humble ourselves in his presence, and to renew our supplications with greater earnestness. This conduct is as sure to succeed, as the other is to fail of success, [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13).

Murmuring against God manifests the most **obstinate impenitence**.

Both our sins and our sorrows ought to produce humility. When they increase our rebellion, our state is almost desperate, [Isaiah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.5). How awfully does such a temperament characterize God's enemies, [Revelation 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.9), and make us resemble those that are consigned over to perdition, [Matthew 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.12). Surely nothing more heinous can be laid to our charge, nor anything more speedily fit us for destruction.

Murmuring against God evinces the most **consummate arrogance**.

To fret and murmur is, in fact, to reprove God. God himself considers it as a direct attack upon him, [Malachi 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.13-14); and can anything be more presumptuous in such worms as we? Paul reprobates this impiety with holy indignation in [Romans 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.20), and every one who allows himself in it, must answer it at his peril! [Job 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2).

We **conclude** with suitable **advice**.

1. Let us search into the causes of our sorrows.

We may be surprised into sin by a sudden temptation, but may trace our fall to preceding unwatchfulness. Nor can we expect God to keep us, if we neglect to keep ourselves. We are rarely earnest enough in using the means of safety. We are too backward to meditation, prayer, and fasting.

Our afflictions also may have come without any misconduct on our part; but who has not merited them by his sins? Men should only be considered as instruments in God's hands, [Psalm 17:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.13-14); and the consideration of God's will should silence every murmur [2 Samuel 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 16.10).

2. Let us always be careful to justify God.

We may not always be able to understand his dispensations, but we should not on that account doubt the equity of them; whatever we suffer, we should not "charge God foolishly." Under the darkest dispensations, we should say as the Psalmist, [Psalm 22:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.2-3). If we wait we shall see the wisdom of many things which now seem utterly inexplicable; we may rest assured that David's assertion shall be verified, [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4).

3. Let us see what improvement may be made of our troubles.

There is no rod which has not a voice to us. Our very sins may be permitted, in order to humble us, and to make us more thankfully cleave to the Savior! Our trials, of whatever kind, are to purge away our dross, and to fit us for our eternal rest. To view them in this light will greatly compose our minds. Instead of murmuring against the Lord, we shall be thankful to him; and instead of increasing our misery, we shall make it a source of joy.

#800

THE CONSEQUENCE OF SLOTH

**[Proverbs 20:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.4)**

"The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." KJV

"A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing." NIV

Arguments from analogy, when the analogy itself is just, are easy of apprehension, and well calculated to convince the mind. One distinguished excellence of the Book of Proverbs is that it abounds with such arguments; and without any formal statement of premises and conclusions, presents the truth to us in short, sententious aphorisms, that are plain, obvious, incontrovertible.

Whoever has made the least observation on human affairs, must have seen the evil consequences of neglecting our proper business in life, whether in farming, or trade, or any other line; and it is easy to infer from thence, that similar consequences must attend a neglect of our Christian duties. Nor is it necessary that this analogy should be always pointed out to us; the whole scope of that divinely inspired book naturally leads us to make a spiritual improvement of the hints, which, in their literal sense, apply only to the things of this life.

Let us then in this view consider,

I. The sluggard's conduct.

The duties both of the gardener and the Christian, require industry.

It was a part of the curse introduced by sin, that man should obtain his bread by the sweat of his brow; nor will the earth yield us anything but briers and thorns unless we bestow much pains in the cultivation of it. Our attention to it must be unremitted; it is not the labor of a month or a year that will suffice; we must repeat again and again the same processes, in order to guard against the noxious weeds that would overrun it, and nourish the good seed which we want it to produce.

In the same way, must the Christian exert himself in order to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. His heart is prolific in what is evil, but barren in what is good; he must therefore daily counteract its natural propensities, and foster the holy desires that have been sown in it. The same work of repentance and faith must be continually renewed, until the Lord himself shall come to gather in his harvest.

Yet are we ever ready to neglect our work on frivolous pretenses.

A regard to temporal interest will often overcome men's natural sloth, and excite them to diligence in their several vocations. Yet are there many instances, where the indulgence of sloth makes men blind to their own happiness, and deaf to the cries of their distressed families.

With respect to spiritual concerns, an indisposition to labor universally prevails in the unsaved. The work of the soul is irksome and difficult; and most everyone either deems it altogether unnecessary, or desires to defer it as long as possible. But it is observable that the sluggard does not absolutely say, "I hate my work, and therefore will not do it;" much less does he say, "I am determined never to plough at all;" but he finds some excuse for neglecting what he is averse to perform; and fixes on some plea, which, in certain circumstances and to a certain extent, might be sufficient.

Thus the professing Christian does not say, "I hate repentance and faith in Christ;" much less does he resolve never to repent and believe; but he always has some reason at hand for deferring this unpleasant work, and promises himself a more convenient season, before the time for ploughing is entirely passed away. He has the cares of a family, or a pressure of business, or something that serves him for an excuse; but, upon examination, it will either be found a mere excuse, or a reason, on which he lays a very improper stress; making use of it to justify a total and habitual neglect, when, at the most, it would only account for a partial and occasional omission. But as a gardener who should yield to such a disposition is denominated by God himself, "a sluggard," so we are sure, that he, who on such frivolous pretexts intermits his Christian duties, will receive no better appellation at the day of judgment than that of a "wicked and slothful servant!"

But in whoever such conduct is found, he will at last have reason to deplore,

II. The consequences of spiritual sloth.

As industry and wealth—so idleness and poverty, are very closely connected.

Circumstances occur in this world to interrupt the natural operation of causes and effects; but in general, where any man's subsistence depends upon his labor, the consequences of sloth or activity will be such as might be expected.

In spiritual things the rule is absolute and invariable. Every man's progress will be according to his labor. Some indeed may enjoy more of comfort than others, from other causes than their own diligence; but every person's real proficiency in grace will be proportioned to the improvement he makes of the talents committed to him. Without detracting at all from the grace of God, we may safely affirm that the difference between one Christian and another in respect of victory over sin, and happiness in the divine life—must be traced in a very great measure to their different degrees of watchfulness in secret duties.

This truth however will not appear in its full extent until the day of judgment.

At the time of harvest the care or negligence of the gardener will very clearly appear; and, if we suppose a man to have wholly neglected the cultivation of his fields, he would find himself destitute, while others were satiated with abundance; nor, if he were reduced to beggary, would he find anyone to pity his forlorn condition.

But his situation, as deplorable as it would be, is not to be compared with that of a negligent professor in the day of judgment. He will see others reaping a glorious harvest, while he is not permitted even to glean agrain; he will behold others "crowned with glory and honor and immortality," while nothing remains for him but "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish!"

The foolish virgins, who slept while they should have been procuring oil for their lamps, came and pleaded in vain for admittance, when the door was once shut against them; none but the wise virgins were allowed to participate the marriage feast.

In the same manner, the rich man, who lived only to the flesh, sought in vain for one drop of water to mitigate his anguish, while Lazarus, who had lived to nobler purposes, had a fullness of joy in Abraham's bosom.

Thus also will it be with all, when the great harvest shall arrive! Those who had improved their season of grace, will be partakers of eternal glory! While those who had wasted it in sloth and self-indulgence will reap the fruits of their folly, in deserved shame, in perpetual want, in unalleviated, unpitied, everlasting misery!

APPLICATION.

1. Let us, in the view of this subject, take shame to ourselves.

How long has our season of grace been protracted; and what little improvement have we made of it! How apt are we to yield to sloth, and to defer the most important of all duties on slight and frivolous pretenses, which we know beforehand will never satisfy our Judge! But what can ever equal this folly?

A sluggard in temporal things may find someone to pity his distress; and may learn from his experience to amend.

But who will ever pity the self-ruined sinner? Or what further opportunity for amendment will be afforded him? Let us then begin, and prosecute without remission, the work of our souls. Let us "plow up the fallow ground, and sow in righteousness," knowing assuredly, that "the diligent hand shall make us rich," and that, "if we sow in tears we shall reap in joy."

2. Let us look forward with earnestness to the future harvest.

The gardener waits with patience, in expectation that the harvest will compensate his labors. And will not our harvest repay all the exertions we can use, and all the self-denial we can exercise? Let us then put forth all the energies of our souls in preparing for that day. Let us not any any difficulties or discouragements to abate our ardor; but "whatever our hand finds to do, let us do it with all of our might," "and so much the more as we see the day approaching."

#801

TRUE PIETY IS RARE

**[Proverbs 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.6)**

"Most will proclaim their own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?"

If we were to apply to every individual for an estimate of his own character, and to form our estimate of the world from the aggregate report—we would soon find, that self-knowledge is a rare attainment, and that men are but partial judges in their own cause. Hence it is, that the more interaction we have with the world, the more we learn to distrust the professions of men, and to suspend our judgment of them, until we have more substantial ground whereon to form it.

Some indeed, from seeing unsuspecting youth so often become a prey to designing men, and frankness and candor so often fall a sacrifice to deceit and treachery—have been led almost to expel charity from their hearts, and practically to reverse its most established laws. Charity would require that we believe every man to be honest, until we have evidence to the contrary; but they exempt no man from their suspicions, until a full experience of his integrity has constrained them to revere his character. But between the extremes of blind confidence and uncharitable suspicion, there is a medium, a cautious reserve which prudence dictates and religion approves. Such a reserve seems naturally, and as it were necessarily, to result from the observation in our text; an observation humiliating indeed to our proud nature, but justified by the actual state of mankind in all ages; and fitly calculated to guard us against an undue confidence either in ourselves or others.

This observation we shall confirm, by showing,

I. That a **profession of goodness**is common to most all.

The virtues of truth, honor, integrity, benevolence, friendship, liberality, are claimed by every one as the inherent and characteristic qualities of his heart; and even piety itself is, if men's opinions of themselves are true, an inmate of every bosom. "Goodness" is not only approved by all, but claimed as the property of all.

1. Of the **immoral** and **profane**.

They will say, as hypocrites do, "that they are as good as their neighbors. It is true, that they are not always quite so upright in their conduct as they might be; yes, they are sometimes betrayed into follies which they cannot justify; but they mean no harm; they injure nobody; they have good intentions, good dispositions, good hearts!"

The fruit is bad, they acknowledge; but they will have it, that the tree is good.

2. Of the outwardly **moral**.

These have greater pretensions to goodness, it may be thought; but their estimate of their own character is scarcely less erroneous than the judgment of the profane. They are observant of many duties; and oftentimes are really eminent for honor and integrity in their dealings. But they omit from their catalogue of duties all that pertains to the spiritual life, and content themselves with a system of heathen ethics.

Humility and contrition,  
faith and love,  
heavenly-mindedness,  
and communion with God,  
are scarcely considered by them as forming any part of true goodness. On the contrary, they allow themselves in self-esteem, self-preference, self-righteousness, and self-dependence; and, when full of these hateful dispositions, they will be "thanking God (with the Pharisee) that they are not as other men! [Luke 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.11)," and will, in the habit of their minds at least, say to a repenting publican, "Stand aside; come not near to me; I am holier than you! [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.5)." Of these Paul says, that "they have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof! [2 Timothy 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.5)."

3. Of the unsound professor.

No one stands higher in his own conceit, than the person who has learned to talk about the Gospel—but not to practice its precepts. Because he has a zeal for some religious tenets, or for his own particular party in the Church, he is ready to conclude himself a true, perhaps an eminent, Christian; even though his religion is seated altogether in his head, and has never descended to his heart! He never stops to inquire into his spirit and conduct, or to examine whether his characters and dispositions accord with those of Christ. It is highly probable that he is guilty of very shameful neglect in many of his social and domestic duties.

As a master, he is proud and imperious;  
as a servant, he is inattentive and impatient of rebuke;  
as a parent, he is remiss in the instruction of his family;  
as a child, he is willful and disobedient to his parents;  
in conversation, he is censorious;  
in dealings, he is unfaithful; and  
in the whole of his demeanor—he is either conceited, ostentatious, petulant, or morose.

Yet behold, this man, because he can talk about religion, arrogates to himself the title of being a good man. Truly this man, whatever he may think of himself, belongs to "the 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)." He "professes to know God; but in works denies Him! [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16)."

But however common a profession of goodness may be, it must be confessed,

II. That a life suited to this profession is very rare.

We have seen what opinion we should form of the world, if we implicitly received men's record of themselves. But, if we apply to those who have been most conversant with the world, what shall we think of it then? Will they not tell us, that scarcely any man is at all to be trusted, where his own interests are at stake; that it is scarcely possible to have dealings in any branch of commerce, without meeting with numberless frauds and impositions; and that, if you rely on men's professions of unselfishness and friendship, you will, as soon as you come into any great trouble, find yourself in the predicament of one, "who has a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint! [Proverbs 25:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.19);" being not only deceived in your expectations of support, but deriving great pain from your endeavors to obtain it?

Even in reference to these virtues to which all lay claim, and to be destitute of which they would account it the greatest disgrace, we may apply that humiliating question, "A faithful man who can find?" We must not indeed understand this question as importing that no such person can be found; but only, that there are very few. But we must not limit the question to mere heathen virtues; we must extend it to all the obligations, which, as Christians, we acknowledge.

1. Who then is faithful to his **principles**?

As Christians, we profess:  
to lie low before God,  
to live by faith in his dear Son,  
to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service,  
and to seek our happiness in communion with God.

But where are they whose lives correspond with these professions? Are they not so few, that they are even "wonders upon earth?" As for the generality of professors, they will commend departed saints, but revile and persecute the living ones; they will applaud goodness in general, but decry and discourage it in its most exalted particulars.

2. Who then is faithful to his **promises**?

[We see Simeon's Anglicanism in much of this paragraph.]

In our infant baptism we all promised to "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." When we were confirmed, we renewed these promises, and confirmed, by our own personal consent, the engagements that had been before made in our behalf. If we have attended at the Lord's Supper, we there also solemnly dedicated unto God ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to him; to be employed in his service, and, if he sees fit, to be consumed for his glory.

How have we fulfilled these promises?

Has the world been under our feet?

Have all the desires of the flesh been mortified?

Have the service and enjoyment of God been the one business of our lives?

3. Who then is faithful to his **convictions**?

There is no one so thoughtless or obdurate, but he has at some times a conviction arising in his mind that he ought to repent and turn to God, and to prepare for death and judgment. Even the most advanced Christians feel many secret reproofs in their consciences, and are constrained to acknowledge that they should be:  
more meek and humble,  
more earnest and vigilant,  
more pure and spiritual.

But who is faithful to his convictions? Who makes the advances that he ought, or the advances that he might?

APPLICATION:

1. Learn to be jealous over ourselves.

If there is so much self-deceit in the world—then who are we, that we should be altogether free from it?

Have not we a great measure of self-love within us, as well as others?

Are not we liable to be biased in our judgment by passion and self-interest?

Is not our heart, no less than the hearts of others, "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?"

Surely we have need to tremble, when we hear God saying to us, "There is a way that seems right unto a man, and the end thereof are the ways of death! [Proverbs 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.12)." And again, "That which is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God! [Luke 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.15)."

Let us then be on our guard against the conceit of our own goodness; let us bring ourselves to the touchstone of God's Word; and let us beg of God 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)." "Not he who commends himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commends! [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18)."

2. Learn to seek the influences of God's grace.

It is no easy matter to be a Christian indeed—"an Israelite without deceit." We may be free from gross sin, and yet far enough from that state in which we ought to be. Our own efforts (so to speak) may suffice to "keep the outside clean;" but who, except God, can cleanse the heart? None, but he who formed the universe at first, can create our souls anew; nor unless "chosen and called and sanctified by him," shall we ever be found "faithful" in the last day, [Revelation 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 17.14). Let us, under a full conviction of our own insufficiency, cry mightily unto him; that he would "put a new spirit within us, and cause us to keep his statutes and his commandments, to obey them! [Ezekiel 36:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26-27)." It is "he who must work all our works in us;" it is he alone that can make us "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ!"

3. Learn to value and trust in the righteousness of Christ alone.

Who among us would dare to found his hopes of salvation on his own faithfulness? Who is not sensible that he has, in instances without number, been unfaithful to his principles, his promises, and his convictions? If we presumed to stand on that ground, God would say, "Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant!" But, if we were not conscious of any unfaithfulness, we still could not venture to make that the foundation of our hopes; because we are so ignorant of ourselves, and so prone to self-deceit. We could even then only say with the Apostle, "I know nothing by myself—yet am I not hereby justified; but he who judges me is the Lord." Yes, we must then cast ourselves altogether on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Let this then be done by every one of us; and, instead of proclaiming every one his own goodness, let us all humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes, and say with the Church of old, "In the Lord alone I have righteousness and strength! [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

#802

NO SINLESS PERFECTION HERE BELOW

**[Proverbs 20:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.9)**

"Who can say: I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"

The great characteristic of the Proverbs is wisdom; as that of the Psalms is piety. They were the result of much thought and observation; and the instructions contained in them were such as a father might be supposed to give to his children. Occasionally, however, according as his mind had been occupied, the tenor of his observations was varied; and they assumed, what may be rather called, a vein of piety. We suppose, that, when he penned the passage before us, he had been led into some unexpected discovery of the corruptions of his own heart; and from thence had been drawn to contemplate in a more extended view the general depravity of human nature, not merely as evinced by the ungodly, but as manifested by the remains of sin in the most eminent saints. However this may be, his observation is deep, and of singular importance. It is a challenge to the whole world, to find, if they can, a perfect man. Let us consider:

I. The truth that is here intimated.

There have been, and yet are, people in the church who boast of sinless perfection. But they are awfully deluded. In order to maintain their favorite system, they reduce exceedingly the requirements of God's law; they deny many things to be sin, which most assuredly are sin; and, after all, they shut their eyes against many things which they know to be sinful in their own hearts and lives, but which they will not acknowledge to be sinful, lest they should overturn the system which they are anxious to defend. But it is a certain truth, that no man is sinless in this world.

1. The sinfulness of all people is seen in the express declarations of Holy Writ.

Both the Old Testament and the New concur to establish this truth. Solomon, at his dedication of the temple, expressly asserted, that "there was no man that lived and sinned not, [1 Kings 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.46);" and more strongly does he elsewhere affirm, that "there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not, [Ecclesiastes 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.20)."

To this agree also the testimonies of the inspired Apostles. John says, that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, [1 John 1:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.8-10);" and James says, that "we all stumble in many ways, [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2)." The whole Scripture uniformly attests this solemn truth.

2. The sinfulness of all people is seen in undeniable instances.

Among the most distinguished of God's people, were Abraham, and Moses, and Hezekiah, and Paul; yet all of these, even when they had arrived at the summit of human excellence, fell into sin.

Abraham, purely through fear, twice denied his own wife, and thereby subjected her and others to temptations, which might have issued in the everlasting destruction of their souls.

Moses, the meekest man upon the face of the earth, gave way to anger, whereby he provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan.

Hezekiah, than whom no man upon the whole ever more honored God—yet yielded to pride and creature-confidence, when he showed all his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon.

Paul, after he had preached for twenty years, and attained an eminence in the divine life, not inferior to that of any man, was so carried away by his own spirit under a sudden trial and temptation, that he reviled God's High Priest, which he himself acknowledged to be a violation of an express command.

Who then, after viewing these, will "say, that he is pure from sin?"

3. The sinfulness of all people is seen in the confessions of God's most eminent saints.

Job, previous to his trials, was pronounced by God "a perfect man;" yet, after his trials, he confessed, "Behold, I am vile!"

Paul occupies a whole chapter in his epistle to the Romans in describing the internal conflicts of his mind; sin and grace mutually striving to overpower each other, and disabling him from fully vanquishing the one, or carrying into effect the dictates of the other. "In his flesh," he says, "dwelt no good thing;" but there was, notwithstanding all the attainments of his renewed mind, "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."

Will any other person say, "I am pure from all sin?" From the dominion of sin every saint may affirm that he is freed; yes, and from the willful and allowed indulgence of any sin. David justly appeals to God respecting his perfect freedom from sin, as to any intention and purpose to commit it, [Psalm 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.3); as Job also does respecting the extinction of its reigning power, "You know, that I am not wicked, [Job 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.7)." But, if any man should go farther, and say, that sin was not still living within him, and operating occasionally to the polluting of his soul, he must stand self-convicted, and self-condemned; just as Job has said, "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); [Job 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-31)."

Such being the state of our fallen nature, it befits us to consider,

II. The improvement we should make of the truth of the universal sinfulness of mankind.

This truth should never be lost sight of for one moment; it should regulate every feeling of the heart; it should never cease to call forth and to augment,

1. Our humiliation.

The best of us are sinful creatures. We are in the situation of wretched captives, who, having a dead body fastened to them, were compelled to drag it about, until they themselves were destroyed by its pestilential vapors. This, it must be acknowledged, is a most humiliating truth. Hence, when we are taught to "loath ourselves for our iniquities and our abominations," we must remember that it is not for the sinful actions only that are long since past, but for the taint also which they have left behind them, that this self-abasement is necessary. So Job thought, [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6), and so Isaiah, [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5), and so Paul, [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24); and, if we know ourselves aright, we shall find no terms more suited to express our real state, than those in which the prophet Isaiah described the Jews of his day, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores! [Isaiah 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.5-6)."

2. Our watchfulness.

A storehouse wherein there was a large store of combustible matter that might produce extensive injury by an explosion, would be guarded with all possible care. In the same way, can any care be too great, when we consider how many thousand things there are on every side ready to kindle a destructive flame in our hearts, and how incessantly our great adversary is striving to make use of them for our destruction? We know not what a day or an hour may bring forth. We may be as far from thinking of evil as at any moment of our lives, and yet evil may arise from some unexpected quarter, and produce upon us the most painful consequences.

We are never safe for one moment, except when we are upheld in the arms of our Almighty Friend! We should therefore be continually crying to him, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps do not slip!" At the same time that we should be striving continually to "put off the old man, and to put on the new." This is the advice given us by our Lord himself, "Watch, and pray that you enter not into temptation;" for however "willing the spirit is" to approve itself to God, "the flesh is weak."

3. Our gratitude.

What a miracle of mercy is it, that, with so much corruption within us, we are preserved in any measure from dishonoring our holy profession! The wonder is not that any fall, but that any are "kept from falling." And to whom is it owing that any of us are enabled to maintain our steadfastness in the divine life? Is it to ourselves? No! Peter's example shows us what we would soon be, if left to ourselves: Satan would soon "sift us all as wheat," if our blessed Savior did not intercede for us, and give us fresh supplies of grace and strength, [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32). Let us then be sensible of our great and unbounded obligations to Him, who has said, that "he keeps the feet of his saints." Let us bear in mind to whom it is owing, that, notwithstanding the bush is ever burning, it is yet unconsumed; and let us give all the glory of our stability to God, saying with David, "My foot stands in an even place; in the congregations I will bless the Lord! [Psalm 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.12)."

4. Our love to Christ.

Notwithstanding in ourselves we are so corrupt—in Christ we are accepted, and beloved of the Lord. Washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness, we are presented unto the Father "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; yes, holy, and without blemish." O! how "precious" ought this Savior to be to all our souls! How continually should we go to him, and plunge beneath "the fountain of his blood, which was opened for sin and for impurity," and which is able to "cleanse us from all sin!" How should we delight ourselves in him, and "cleave to him," and "glory in him," and devote ourselves to him! Yes, brethren, this is the tribute which we owe to our blessed Lord.

We must "not continue in sin, that grace may abound," but turn from sin because grace has abounded; and, "because He has bought us with the inestimable price of his own blood, we should strive to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his! [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)."

#803

DESIRE IS NOTHING WITHOUT LABOR

**[Proverbs 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.25)**

"The desire of the slothful kills him; for his hands refuse to labor."

It is the duty of a minister to "comfort the Lord's people," and on no account to "make the heart of the righteous sad." Our blessed Lord "will not brake the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax;" and in this respect all who minister in his name must follow his example, never "despising the day of small things," but "carrying the lambs in their bosom, and gently leading those who are with young." But there are occasions whereon they "must change their voice, especially when they stand in doubt of any," or judge it necessary to give a beneficial warning to their flocks.

Now there is an error against which I would wish affectionately to guard you, and that is, the laying of an undue stress upon good desires without pressing forward for the attainment of the object desired. To this line of instruction I am led by the passage before us; from which I will take occasion:

I. To show you the influence of good desires.

It is plain that, in Solomon's opinion, good desires, which when duly cherished and improved, will be productive of the happiest effects, may through sloth and indolence issue in self-deception and ruin. That we may have a just view of this important subject, I will mark:

1. The influence of good desires in the bosoms of the diligent.

This, though not expressly mentioned, is evidently implied, since it is in the slothful alone that good desires can have a fatal outcome.

Now we need only see how desire operates in diligent men, whatever their vocation may be, whether in trade, or agriculture, or science; and that will show us how it will operate in reference to religion; it will stimulate men to such exertions as are necessary to the acquisition of the object desired.

For the attainment of Heaven, we must exert ourselves in away of "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;" and, if our desires after Heaven are sincere, they will render us earnest and laborious in the pursuit of these, and never allow us to pause until we have actually attained them. Thus accompanied with diligence, holy desires will bring us to the enjoyment of peace and holiness and glory.

2. The influence of good desires in the bosoms of the slothful.

In them good desires may justly be said to occasion death. They do so indirectly, because they are not productive of suitable exertions. It is said, "The slothful man roasts not that which he took in hunting, [Proverbs 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.27)." And this is precisely the case with those whose conduct we are considering. They have, in consequence of their good desires, pursued and obtained the knowledge of religious truth; but in consequence of their sloth they have neglected to follow their advantages, and to improve their attainments for the benefit of their souls.

Hence "their vineyard is overgrown with thorns, and the stone wall thereof is fallen down; yes, and poverty comes upon them (gradually) like one that travels, and want (irresistibly) like an armed man, [Proverbs 24:30-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.30-34);" so true is that declaration of Solomon, "One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys! [Proverbs 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.9)."

But this is by no means the full sense of our text. It is not in an indirect way only that in the slothful man good desires operate to the production of death; no; they have a direct influence towards the destruction of his soul.

The man in whose bosom good desires arise, is conscious of them; and takes occasion from them to entertain a good opinion of his state before God. He puts them in the place of good attainments; and, because he hopes that they shall at some future period accomplish their proper work, he overlooks the necessity of immediately experiencing that work, and conceives, that God will, if I may so speak, accept the will for the deed. To approve this delusion, he applies to himself such promises as these, "The Lord will fulfill the desire of those who fear him, [Psalm 145:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.19);" "The desire of the righteous shall be granted, [Proverbs 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.24)." He forgets that the end is connected with the means; and that, however we may acknowledge our obligations to God for ability to will what is good, we can have no hope of acceptance with him, unless we exert ourselves with all diligence to do it, and to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13)." Hence he is a living witness of that melancholy fact, "The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, while the soul of the diligent is made fat! [Proverbs 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.4)." Yes, to all eternity will he be a monument of that mysterious truth. "The desire of the slothful kills him!"

Having marked the operation of good desires, I now proceed,

II. To offer some beneficial counsel in relation to good desires.

Doubtless good desires must take the lead, yes, and must move us, in the whole of our Christian course; but, as "faith itself is dead without works"—so are good desires of no value any farther than they are productive of holy lives. I say then, if God has given any good desires to you:

1. See to it that your good desires are **Abiding**.

There are few people so depraved but they have felt on some particular occasion the risings of good desire. But to what purpose are such emotions in the soul, if they "pass away like the morning cloud, or as the early dew? [Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.4)." To know what is good, and not to do it, involves us in the heavier guilt! [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17), and will prove a ground of heavier condemnation to the soul; as God has said, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil! [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19)." If then you would derive real benefit from the desires which God has mercifully implanted in you, see that they take root within you, and become living and active principles in your souls.

2. See to it that your good desires are **Operative**.

You desire to obtain salvation. It is well—but to what purpose will this desire be, if it does not stimulate you to action? Will a desire of knowledge render anyone a learned man, if he neglects his studies? Will a desire of a harvest enrich a man, if he neglects to cultivate his land? How then can you hope that a desire of Heaven will ever bring you there, if you neglect the concerns of your souls?

You must read the Holy Scriptures with meditation and prayer.

You must search out your sins, and mourn over them before God.

You must get views of Christ as the only Savior of the world, and must go to him continually that you may receive out of his fullness the grace that shall be sufficient for you.

You must be gaining an increasing victory over the world, and the flesh, and the devil—and be growing more and more like unto your God and Savior in righteousness and true holiness.

You must be living more for God in the midst of this corrupt world, and be bringing glory to his name by your exertions in his sacred cause.

It is in this way that your good desires must work, if you would have them productive of any saving benefit to your souls. The stony-ground hearers, whose desires were only temporary, perished, notwithstanding the fair appearances which for a season they assumed; as did the thorny-ground hearers also, because they "brought forth no fruit to perfection."

In the same way, you also must not only begin well, but "endure unto the end," and "be faithful unto death," if ever you would be saved in the great day of the Lord Jesus. The "slothful," be they who they may, shall be condemned in that day as wicked! [Matthew 25:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.26).

3. See to it that your good desires are **Supreme**.

"You cannot serve God and mammon." The world may have your hands; but God must have your heart—your whole heart! [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26). He will not accept a divided heart, [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2). "The world must become crucified to you, and you unto the world, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)." "Your affections must be set on things above, and not on things below, [Colossians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1);" and "your conversation must be in Heaven, [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20)." "There must be nothing either in Heaven or earth that you desire besides God, [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)."

You must resemble David, who says, "This one thing I have desired [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4)." and Paul, who says, "This one thing I do [Philippians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13)." Then shall God fully answer you in the desires of your heart, and your efforts will be crowned with glorious success!

#804

LIVING IN THE FEAR OF GOD

**[Proverbs 23:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.17-18)**

"Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."

The men of this world, feeling but little restraint from the voice of conscience or the fear of God, gratify, each in his own way, their natural inclinations, and therefore they appear happy.

The people of God, especially under troubles and persecutions for righteousness sake, are almost ready to look upon the wicked with an eye of envy. For if this present world alone were considered, and temporal enjoyments were the proper standard of happiness, perhaps the ungodly might on the whole be encouraged as possessing a happy and an enviable lot, [Psalm 73:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3-5).

But the righteous, under whatever disadvantages they may lie, have no just cause to "envy sinners;" seeing that nothing but disappointment awaits the people of this world; while the servants of God, who look forward to heavenly bliss, can never be disappointed of their hope. On this assurance the exhortation in my text is founded; and for the fuller elucidation of the subject, I will set before you,

I. The duty inculcated.

"The fear of the Lord" is, especially in the Old Testament, a common expression, comprehending in its import the whole of saving religion. And when we are bidden to live under its influence always, we must understand the precept as enjoining us to maintain, throughout the whole course of our lives:

1. A sense of love to God, as our **Father**.

Jehovah, as reconciled to us through the Son of his love, stands in the relation of a Father to us; for all, the very instant they believe in Christ, have "the privilege of becoming the Sons of God, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12)."

Until we come to God by Christ, we have no filial fear of him in our hearts. A slavish fear of him we may have; but we neither have, nor can have, "a Spirit of adoption, emboldening us to call him Father;" for "the Holy Spirit can never bear witness with our spirit, that we are the Lord's, [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-16)," until we are made his by faith in Christ Jesus, [Galatians 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.26). But when we have become his children, then we must go in and out before him with holy confidence, exactly as dutiful children before a loving parent. To walk thus before him was the perfection of Abraham's attainments, [Genesis 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.1); and it is that which is held forth to us also as the summit of a Christian's duty and privilege, [Ephesians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.1).

2. A sense of duty to God, as our **Master**.

This is united with the former by God himself, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master; if, then, I am a father, where is my honor? and if I am a master, where is my fear? [Malachi 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.6)." Now, what is the conduct of a good servant? When he rises in the morning, he asks himself, 'What have I to do for my master? and through every part of the day, even to the close of it, the same question recurs to his mind, and calls forth suitable exertions for the discharge of the duties required of him. And if, when engaged in executing his master's commands, he were solicited by anyone to embark in some other pursuit, he would immediately reply, as our blessed Savior did, "I must be about my Father's business;" nor could any consideration tempt him to neglect his duty. He would, under all circumstances, regard his master's work as claiming a just preference at his hands, and his master's approbation as that which, above all, he was anxious to obtain.

Let it be thus, then, with you in every situation of life; and make it your one business to approve yourselves as good servants of Jesus Christ.

3. A sense of responsibility to God, as our **Judge**.

Never are you to lose a sense of this. It is quite a mistake to call this legalism. Paul, and all the Apostles, acted with a direct reference to the future judgment; and sought so to demean themselves that they might welcome the second coming of their Lord, and stand with boldness before him at that solemn day! [1 Corinthians 9:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.26-27). [2 Corinthians 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.9-10). [James 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.8-9). [1 Peter 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.1-4). This will secure the obedience of the heart; for in that day shall "the secrets of men's hearts be disclosed," and, "their inmost counsels be made manifest;" and, to secure his approbation then, you must be upright, and without any allowed deceit.

Let every place then bear, as it were, this inscription, "You, God, see me;" and take heed to your thoughts, no less than to your actions, so that you may be found "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ! [Philippians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.10)."

And, lest such a constant attention to duty should appear irksome to you, let me show you,

II. The **encouragement**given to us in living in the fear of God.

The whole Scripture declares, that, "truly, there is a reward for the righteous! [Psalm 58:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 58.11);" and this, I conceive, is the true import of my text, see [Proverbs 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.14).

The ungodly hope to find happiness in their ways of sin; but they pursue a phantom, and embrace a shadow.

But not so those who fear the Lord; they shall "have a sure reward;" as God has said, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish! [Proverbs 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.28) with 11:18."

What, then, my brethren, do you expect?

Do you expect **pardon of sin**?

This shall surely be accorded to you; for "in the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge, [Proverbs 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.26)." Yes, truly, however numerous your sins may have been, "they shall all be blotted out, even as a morning cloud." Will God cast out one who comes to him in his Son's name? Will he spurn from his footstool one humble suppliant? No, "to this man will he look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at his Word, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2);" and "to him will he give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness! [Psalm 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 61.1-3)."

Do you expect **peace of conscience**?

This also shall you possess. Hear what David says, "What man is he who fears the Lord? Him shall the Lord teach in the way that he shall choose; and his soul shall dwell at ease, [Psalm 25:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.12-13)." Peace is the legacy which Jesus has bequeathed to all his redeemed people, saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you! [John 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.27)." "To the wicked there is no peace, [Isaiah 57:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.21), "but for you is there "a peace that passes all understanding."

Do you expect **strength for duty**?

Doubtless you may have many difficulties to encounter; but God himself promises that "your strength shall be according to your day." His very covenant with his people is, "He will put his fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)." This is a principle which cannot but operate, and cannot but be effectual for the mortification of all sin, and for the performance of all duty. See its operation in the Apostle Paul. Under trials as severe as man could well be called to endure, he said, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it is by life or by death [Philippians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.19-20)."

Thus you may encounter all difficulties without fear; and, knowing in whom you have believed, may assure yourselves that no enemy whatever shall be able to prevail against you! [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39).

Do you expect **comfort in death**?

This also is secured to you, "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)." I do not say that you shall have joy; for there may be in the very nature of your disorder much to prevent that buoyancy of mind which is a necessary attendant on joy; but peace shall assuredly he your portion, if only you trust in God; for God has 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)."

Do you expect **glory in eternity**?

This also shall be yours. Your expectations cannot be too enlarged, if you walk in the fear of God as you are here enjoined, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says the Lord; thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give you an expected end! [Jeremiah 29:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.11)." And in this you differ widely from the lost sinner, who casts off the fear of God. To people of this latter description God says, "What fruit had you then of those things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness and your end everlasting life, [Romans 6:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.21-22)."

Tell me now, brethren, whether you have not encouragement to fear the Lord? and whether there is any sinner in the universe whose portion can be compared with yours?

APPLICATION.

As for you who do not fear God, whatever you may possess of this world, or whatever gratifications you may enjoy—you have a miserable portion indeed! And though you abounded with everything, like the Rich Man in the Gospel—yet a pious Lazarus, that was destitute of all things, or even a martyr at the stake, is a preferable state to yours! Well may you envy the poorest, the lowest saint on earth. Where will you look . . .  
for pardon,  
for peace,  
for strength,  
for comfort in a dying hour,  
and for glory in eternity?

Think of your misery before it is too late; and beg of God to implant in your hearts that fear of his name, which is the certain and the only prelude to his final approbation!

#805

BUYING THE TRUTH

**[Proverbs 23:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.23)**

"Buy the truth; and sell it not!"

The rich variety of metaphors contained in the Holy Scriptures gives an endless diversity to the most simple truths; and the commonness of those metaphors brings home to our minds the deepest truths with a clearness that cannot be misinterpreted, and a force that cannot be withstood. The idea of buying and selling is familiar to every mind; so familiar, that many would be offended at the application of it to the concerns of the soul. But we should not affect a squeamishness which the inspired writers did not feel; except, indeed, in reference to subjects which, though not offensive to Jewish ears, the refinement of modern ages has justly deemed indelicate. Permit me then, without offence, to show you,

I. What it is that is here commended to us.

Truth, abstractedly considered, is of great value; and the acquisition of it in science and philosophy is counted worthy of the most laborious researches. In astronomy, for instance, the ascertaining of the motion and mutual relation of the heavenly bodies is justly regarded as a rich recompense for a whole life of labor. But this is not the truth of which my text speaks; for that, once gained, remains with us; whereas the truth which is here commended to us may be sold as well as bought.

"The truth" here referred to is the Gospel.

The Gospel was revealed to Abraham, as well as unto us; and it was made yet more fully known to Moses and the Israelites; though, from their "not mixing faith with it, it did not profit them." On us it shines in its meridian splendor; it exhibits to us a Savior, even, our incarnate God, living and dying for sinful men; and marks our path to Heaven so plainly, that "a way-faring man, though a fool, cannot err therein".

This gospel truth is of incalculable importance to every man.

There is much truth which the philosopher alone can appreciate or understand. But "the truth as it is in Jesus," may be understood by all. It is not by strength of intellect that its wonders are discerned, but by a spiritual perception, which God alone can impart, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). "At that time Jesus said: I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children! [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26)." And to every human being it is of equal importance; none can be saved without it, and by it every creature in the universe may be saved.

Our blessed Lord has assured us of this, "You shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free! [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32)." Nothing but gospel truth will impart true freedom; but that will make us free indeed; delivering us from all the guilt we have ever contracted, and from all the bondage under which we have groaned. Let us only "receive the truth in the love of it," and we shall he brought by it into the "glorious liberty of the children of God."

II. The advice given us in relation to gospel truth.

"Buy the truth!"

"Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding!" [Proverbs 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.7)

It must be purchased. As freely as it is given, I say again, it must be purchased; it must be bought with labor, and with the sacrifice of everything that can stand in competition with it. The fruits of the earth, though given us entirely by God through the beneficial influence of the sun and rain-clouds, must be sought and labored for; nor can we hope to obtain "the fruits of the Spirit" without similar exertions. Solomon tells us, that, notwithstanding that it is "the Lord who gives knowledge"—that "we must cry after it, and lift up our voice for it, and seek it as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures; and that then only can we understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God! [Proverbs 2:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.3-6)."

Nor is it less necessary that we be ready to part with all earthly interests in order to secure gospel truth. Our Lord compares the Gospel salvation to "a treasure hidden in a field," and to "a pearl of great price; which whoever finds, should go and sell all that he has and purchase it! [Matthew 13:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.44-46)." If, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel, we refuse to part with all, we never can possess the salvation of God.

Paul is our pattern in this respect. He possessed more religious accomplishments than most any other person, yet he says, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith, [Philippians 3:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-9)."

And it is worthy of observation, that among the things which he despised thus, are to be reckoned, not his temporal interests only, but his own carnal wisdom and his legal righteousness! [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9), which, to a man of Pharisaic habits, are far more dear than all the world besides. After his example, then, we must renounce all that is pleasing to flesh and blood, and take "Christ for our Wisdom, our Righteousness, our Sanctification, and our complete Redemption!"

2. "Sell it not".

We shall be continually tempted to part with it; but we must "hold fast what we have, that no man may take our crown." We must "never, after having once put our hand to the plough, look back again." In seasons of prosperity we may be lulled to sleep; and Satan may rob us of our prize. And in times of persecution we may be intimidated, and draw back through fear.

But "nothing," however terrible, "should move us." We should "be ready, not only to be bound, but also to die, at any time, and in any manner, for the name of the Lord Jesus." If called to suffer for his sake, we must "rejoice that we are counted worthy" of so high an honor; yes, we must even "leap for joy," because we are thereby rendered conformable to Christ, and because "God is glorified in us." We must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would obtain a crown of life!"

ADDRESS.

1. Examine whether you have "the truth" set before you.

In purchasing any commodity, you endeavor to ascertain that it is good and genuine. And so must you do in relation to the Gospel. You must not take anything for granted. You have a touchstone, by which you must try whatever is offered to you for sale, Paul speaks of a false Gospel, as finding an extensive currency in the Galatian Church, [Galatians 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.6-7); and such a Gospel is but too often commended to us at this day. Examine, then, what you hear; and bring it all to the test of God's blessed Word.

The salvation which we offer you, is that which Christ purchased for us on the cross; a salvation altogether by grace alone,

and through faith alone, in Christ alone. It is that, and that only, that we call on you to buy. And our counsel is that which is given to every one of you by our Lord himself, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see! [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18)."

Ascertain, I say, that this is the very truth of God; and then hesitate not to buy it, though at the price of all that you possess!

2. Inquire whether any who have bought gospel truth ever repented of their purchase.

I know, indeed, that you may find stony-ground hearers in every place where the Gospel is preached; yes, and many a Demas too. But the former are people who never had the root of grace within them; and the latter carry back with them into the world a self-condemning conscience, that will embitter their whole lives.

Could you ask of Moses, whether he now regrets, or ever did regret, having sacrificed all the treasures of Egypt for that apparently worthless portion, the reproach of Christ.

Or, could you consult the myriads who "came out of great tribulation," and who "loved not their lives unto death"—would you find one among them all that thought he had ever paid too dear for this heavenly prize?

No! there is no such thought in Heaven; nor is there any such feeling upon earth among the faithful followers of the Lamb. Do not be afraid, then, to pay the price demanded of you; for, as "the gain of the whole world would be a poor matter in exchange for the salvation of soul;" so the sacrifice of life itself will be found to have been unworthy of a thought, when the glory purchased by it shall have been accorded to you!

3. Do not lose the opportunity that is now afforded to you.

What would millions that are now in the eternal world give, if they could have but one more offer of that salvation which they once despised? And soon you yourselves also will be filled with bitter regret, if you close not with the offer now made to you. Do not say that you are poor, and cannot pay the price; for you are invited "to buy it without money and without price! [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)."

O that I might but prevail upon you, before it is too late! Refuse not, with Herod, to give up your Herodias; nor, with Agrippa, to become altogether Christians; but now forsake all for Christ; and expect, both in this world and the next, a rich and glorious recompense! [Luke 18:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.28-30).

#806

THE DUTY OF GIVING THE HEART TO GOD

**[Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26)**

"My son, give me your heart!"

This address, however it may be considered in some respect as delivered by Solomon to his son, must certainly be understood as proceeding from Him who is Wisdom in the abstract, Wisdom personified, even from the Lord Jesus Christ! [Proverbs 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.1); [Proverbs 8:22-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.22-32); and as directed generally to all men, but especially to those who regard him as their Sovereign Lord. And though the more immediate object of the address may seem scarcely suited to this view of it, (because those who are possessed even of incipient piety may seem less likely to fall into the snare which is there spoken of,) yet the caution is necessary for youth of all descriptions; and, as a general lesson, it teaches us that there is no snare whatever into which we may not fall, if our hearts are not given up to God; and that the only sure way of being kept from sin of every kind, is, to give the heart to God.

Taking the words then as addressed by the Lord Jesus Christ to all who acknowledge his paternal authority, we will proceed to mark the extent and reasonableness of this command.

I. The **extent** of this command.

1. To give our heart to God, implies that we give him **the affections of our soul**.

These should all center in him, and in him alone. Him we should desire as our supreme good, and in him should we delight as our chief joy. We should be able to say with David, "Whom have I in Heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you! [Psalm 73:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.23)."

2. To give our heart to God, implies that we give him **the confidence of our mind**.

If there is anything besides God in the whole universe on which we rely, we do not really give our heart to him. To trust, though in ever so small a degree, in an arm of flesh, argues a departure of heart from God, [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5). We should confide altogether in his wisdom to guide us,  
in his power to uphold us,  
in his goodness to supply our needs,  
and in his truth to fulfill to us the promises of his Word.

We should consider him as alone able to help us, and as all-sufficient for our utmost necessities. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding!" [Proverbs 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.5)

3. To give our heart to God, implies that we give him **the service of our life**.

Without this, all else is vain. Obedience is the certain fruit of love to God, [John 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.15); [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21). Yes, it is altogether identified with it, "This is the love of God, that you keep his commandments, [1 John 2:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.3-5)." To the man that has given his heart to God, no commandment can be grievous, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3).

The extent of the command being ascertained, we proceed to show,

II. The **reasonableness** of this command.

To surrender up our whole selves to God, is called by Paul, "a reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." And reasonable indeed it is:

1. Because of his right over us, as our **Creator**.

God "made all things for himself; all that we are, and all that we have—was given us by him, to be improved for his glory. How then can we with propriety alienate anything from him? A potter feels himself entitled to the use of the vessel which his own hands have made. In the same way, has not God a right to all the services that we can render him? Of all that have truly given their hearts to God, it may be said, "No man lives to himself; and no man dies unto himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's! [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8)."

2. Because of his mercies towards us, as our **Redeemer**.

The Lord Jesus Christ has "redeemed us to God by his own blood;" and by this has acquired a new right over us. To this effect the Apostle says, "You are not your own; you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his! [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20)." And in another place he gives this as the duty of every man according to the dictates of his most deliberate judgment, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again! [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15)." Was he mistaken in his judgment? Are we at liberty to alienate from him what he has purchased at so great a price?

3. Because of his relation to us, as our spiritual **Father**.

If we profess to have been born again, and begotten to God by his Word and Spirit, then are we yet further bound to him by the relation he sustains towards us, "What manner of love is this, with which the Father has loved us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Can we have learned to cry, "Abba, Father!" and doubt whether the giving of our hearts to him is a reasonable service? The utmost then we can do to serve and honor him is no more than our bounden duty.

4. Because of the utter worthlessness of all his competitors.

What is there worthy to be compared with him? The whole creation is but as "a broken cistern that can hold no water!" Shall we then, "for anything that is in it, forsake the Fountain of living waters?" Survey the choicest blessings that the world affords; and they are all "vanity and vexation of spirit." Are these then to stand in competition with him who is the unfailing and only source of all blessedness? The more we see the vanity of all created good—the more we shall see the reasonableness of giving our hearts to God alone. We must not only not love our father or mother more than him, but must "hate every earthly relative—yes, and our own lives also, in comparison with him! [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)."

APPLICATION.

1. In a way of **affectionate invitation**.

In this view we may take the words of our text, even as an invitation to us from the Lord Jesus Christ to set our affections on him alone. And how astonishing is it that he will accept such hearts as ours! If we of ourselves had presumed to offer them to him, how justly might he have rejected and despised the offering! Yet behold, he solicits it at our hands! And what can such an offering add to him? Does he need anything from us? or can we add anything to him? O then admire and adore this astonishing condescension; and let him not woo your souls in vain.

2. In a way of **authoritative injunction**.

This command of Almighty God is not to be trifled with. Let none presume to withstand it, or to delay their obedience to it; for if we obey it not, we never can behold his face in peace! [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22). Attend to it then; and see that you obey it in truth. Give not to your God and Savior a divided heart; for such an offering he will not accept; but give yourselves wholly to him; and so shall that promise be fulfilled to you, "I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty!"

#807

THE FOLLY OF VAIN EXCUSES

**[Proverbs 24:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.11-12)**

"If you forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if you say: Behold, we knew it not; does not he who ponders the heart consider it? and he who keeps your soul, does not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?" KJV

"Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" NIV

Official influence is a valuable talent; but to use it aright is often very difficult, and painful to the feelings. Hence those who are possessed of it, are apt to shrink back, when the exercise of it is likely to involve them in much trouble; and they will connive at abuses which they cannot easily prevent. For such connivance they have excuses ever ready at hand, "They were not aware of the circumstances;" or, "They thought their interposition would be to no purpose." But power and responsibility are inseparable; and the magistrate who neglects his duty, must give an account of such neglect to God, and have his excuses weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. To support the needy, and to relieve the oppressed, is a sacred duty, which no man can neglect, but at the peril of his soul; and to deceive ourselves with vain excuses is folly in the extreme.

We shall not however limit our views of this subject to magistrates, but shall extend them generally to all those excuses which men make for their neglect of acknowledged duties; and shall consider,

I. The excuses by which men deceive their own souls.

None are so hardy as to deny their obligation to serve God—yet the great mass of mankind will plead excuses for their neglect.

1. Excuses for their neglect of **spiritual duties**.

"They have not time to attend to their spiritual concerns."

Not time? For what then is their time given them? What other business have they in comparison with this? But, if they would speak the truth, is not their disregard of true religion to be traced rather to:  
their lack of inclination to spiritual things;  
their lack of faith in the divine records;  
their lack of all fear of God;  
their lack of all concern about their souls?

How vain then their plea of lack of time, when their neglect arises from a total alienation of their hearts from God!

2. Excuses for their neglect of **moral duties**.

The duties of sympathy, of compassion, of activity in supporting the distressed, are mentioned in our text. Now for the neglect of these duties, such as:  
the visiting of the sick,  
the instructing of the ignorant,  
the relieving of the needy, and  
the comforting of the afflicted  
—men will plead ignorance, inadvertence, forgetfulness, or inability.

But is there not a great degree of criminality attaching to us, if we do not search out the poor and afflicted, on purpose to alleviate their distresses? Is not the true cause of our supineness, that we have:  
no love to our fellow-creatures,  
no zeal for God,  
no gratitude for redeeming love?

It is in vain to think that our neglects are trivial under any circumstances, and more especially when they originate in cowardice, and sloth, and selfishness!

Seeing then that such excuses are vain. Let us mark,

II. The **folly** of resting in excuses.

Were there no God to call us into judgment, our delusions would be of less consequence; but there is a God by whom all our excuses will be weighed!

1. God will judge with **truth**.

He looks not at the outward appearance, "He searches the heart and tries the thoughts," and is privy to the most secret workings of our minds. We may easily deceive ourselves; but him we cannot deceive. See how forcible is the appeal made to us in our text. Can we have any doubt whether he sees our conduct, or forms a correct estimate of it? Let us remember, that "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart;" and that, whatever our judgment be, his will be according to truth.

2. God will recompense with **equity**.

Here again the appeal is strong, and carries conviction with it. We are sure that "God will judge the world in righteousness," and "give to every man according to his works. "Whatever we have sowed, that shall we also reap; if we have sowed to the flesh, we shall from the flesh reap corruption; but if we have sowed to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Let this subject **teach** us:

1. To be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy.

We are apt to think that conscience is a safe guide, and that we may rest satisfied with its testimony. But conscience is corrupted by the Fall, as well as all the other faculties of the soul. It is blinded, bribed, partial, and in many instances "seared as with a hot iron." Hence it is that "every man's way is right in his own eyes." Paul thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus; and was approved by his own conscience, while he was sinning against God with all his might. Do not be therefore satisfied merely because you feel no condemnation in your own minds; but beg of God to enlighten your conscience, that it may guide you aright, and keep you from those delusions which would involve you in everlasting ruin.

2. To live in daily expectation of the future judgment.

Ask yourselves, not merely, What do I think of this or that conduct? But: What would God say to it, if I were instantly summoned to his tribunal? Such a question as this would often lead you to a very different estimate of yourselves from that which you have formed; and the consideration of his recording everything in order to a future judgment would tend to keep you vigilant in all your conduct. Walk then as in his sight, and be satisfied with nothing which you are not well assured will satisfy him.

#808

THE SLUGGARD'S VINEYARD

**[Proverbs 24:30-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.30-34)**

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall your poverty come as one that travels, and your want as an armed man!" KJV

"I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--and poverty will come on you like a bandit, and scarcity like an armed man!"

If we have an observant eye, and a mind open to receive instruction, there is nothing in the creation which may not afford us some useful lessons. We may learn as much from what we see, as what we hear; and as much from what is evil, as from what is good. Indeed it is a mark of true wisdom to exact a tribute, as it were, from everything which comes within our reach, and to allow nothing to pass without contributing its quota to our stock of useful knowledge.

Solomon has set us a good example in this respect; he saw a vineyard that had been shamefully neglected; and instead of turning away from it, as incapable of affording either pleasure or profit to his mind—he set himself to "consider it well, and to derive instruction from it." Surely then we cannot be unprofitably employed while we consider,

I. The sight which Solomon observed.

It is not uncommon to see ground poorly cultivated, or business neglected; but as people reprehensible for inattention to their worldly concerns are comparatively few—we apprehend that the remedying of the evils arising from it comes rather within the province of private admonition than of public discussion. We shall therefore take occasion from the text to speak of a vineyard which all ought to cultivate, but which all are too prone to neglect. This vineyard is the soul.

1. Generally speaking, the soul lies **uncultivated**.

A man possessed of a common vineyard, ought to procure good plants for it, and to water it regularly, and to weed it carefully, in order that it may yield him its fruits of increase, [Matthew 21:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.33). In the same way, we have the same labor to perform for our souls. We ought to get it filled with the choicest graces from Heaven. We should water it with prayers and tears, and seek to have it nourished with the influences of the Holy Spirit, which when duly sought, will descend on it as the dew, and distill upon it as rain upon the newly-mown grass. We should be daily occupied in pulling up the thorns and nettles that spontaneously rise, and which, if allowed to remain, will materially impede the growth of every good plant.

But is there not reason to fear that the greater part of us have shown ourselves "slothful and void of understanding?" Have we not been shamefully remiss in our attention to these great concerns? Have not the fruits produced by us, been "grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrah?" Have not unbelief and impenitence, pride and anger, envy and malice, covetousness and impurity, with ten thousand other noxious weeds—been allowed to spring up and grow within us, until they have even "covered the face of the ground!" Alas! the proofs of spiritual sloth are but too evident in us all!

2. Generally speaking, the soul lies **unprotected**.

Whatever care a man should take of his vineyard, he would lose his labor, if he should forget to fence it in, "the wild beast of the field would soon root it up and devour it."

In the same way, what then can be expected to spring up in our souls, when they are left at the mercy of every enemy that chooses to tread them down? We would long since have fortified them with mere purposes and resolutions. These purposes and resolutions, it is true, can avail nothing, if made in our own strength. But, if made in reliance upon God, they will be no slight barrier against the invading foe!

Joshua, in [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15),  
David, in [Psalm 119:106](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.106),  
Nehemiah, in [Nehemiah 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.11),  
Paul, in [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13),  
—all of these found them useful and effectual for their preservation. We should also have had our souls strengthened by the grace of Christ. That would have proved "sufficient for us;" it would have been even as a wall, yes, "as a wall of fire, round about us." Above all, we should have taken care to have them encompassed by God's holy covenant, "which is ordered in all things and sure." Enclosed by that, we might defy all the assaults of earth and Hell.

But have we been careful thus to protect our souls? Have we not rather left them open to the incursion of our enemies, the sport of every temptation and the prey of every lust?

Such a melancholy sight should make us doubly attentive to,

II. Solomon's reflections upon the sluggard's field.

Solomon was more desirous to benefit himself, than to incriminate others, even though their conduct was justly reprehensible. His reflections therefore on the sight which he beheld, were of a general nature respecting the evil and danger of sloth.

In the same way, the state of our souls may well lead us to similar reflections, and:

1. Convince us that sloth is **Deceitful**.

The slothful man does not intend to involve himself in ruin; he only pleads for a little more indulgence of his indolent habits. But, alas! His "little slumber" insensibly becomes a great deal; his time passes away, and his work is left undone. The rest which he takes, instead of refreshing him, enfeebles all his powers, and indisposes him for action; so that, though he never intends to plunge himself into difficulties, he does it most effectually.

In the same way, how lamentably does an indisposition to spiritual labor deceive us! No man intends to destroy his own soul; he only pleads for a little more delay, a little more slumber; he thinks he shall awake in time enough to do all that is necessary. Thus, while he sleeps, the thorns and nettles grow, and seed, and multiply, and take such deep root, that they can scarcely ever be eradicated! In the mean time, every good desire that may at any time have sprung up within him, is choked; and the decaying wall that should protect him falls to the ground.

Ah! how many thousands have perished, like Felix, while they were waiting for "a more convenient season!" There has always been some "lion in the way, [Proverbs 26:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 26.13-15)," whenever the time came for labor and exertion; and thus they have lost the only season which the great Gardener had allotted for the performance of their work.

2. Convince us that sloth is **Ruinous**.

The ruin of a man who neglects his farm or merchandise is gradual and irresistible; his finances become more and more embarrassed; and at last he is apprehended for debt, immured in a prison, and reduced to utter "poverty and want." What a picture does this exhibit of a man who neglects his soul! He does not feel the consequences all at once; but "his poverty comes as one that travels"—it proceeds gradually step by step; it is not one hour, or day, that makes a very great difference to a man that is traveling many hundred miles on foot; but every step in reality brings him nearer to his journey's end; and so it is with the man that indulges spiritual sloth; his ruin approaches, though imperceptibly, every day and hour; but though it comes insensibly—yet it will seize upon him irresistibly, even "as an armed man."

How glad would many be in their dying hours, if a portion of the time which they have wasted, could be restored to them! How glad would they be if they could recover the seasons they have lost! But death waits not their leisure; when sent, death executes his office, and transmits them, however reluctant, to the tribunal of their Judge! O that we would endeavor to realize these reflections in our minds, that we may not learn the truth and awfulness of them by bitter experience!

By way of **improving** this subject:

1. We entreat you all to inquire into the state of your spiritual vineyard.

Look well, and compare your ground with that of others; not of sluggards like yourselves—but of the Apostles and primitive Christians. And do not mistake, as, alas! too many do, weeds for plants, such as:

worldliness, for prudence,  
levity, for cheerfulness,  
formality, for devotion,  
pride and hypocrisy, for zeal and piety.

But consult those who are able to instruct you, and be willing to have:  
your vineyard weeded,  
your plants pruned,  
your wall raised, and  
your habits of indolence subdued.

2. We entreat you all to cultivate your spiritual vineyard with speed and diligence.

Had we improved our past time with diligence—then how different would have been the state of our souls! O think of the time that is irretrievably lost; and the probable shortness of that which remains! Do not let sloth deceive you any more. There is not one among us who may not see in his own soul what advances sloth has made, and what an increase of work it has occasioned. Let us be thankful that the period for cultivation is not yet ended; and let us henceforth "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil!"

#809

RETURNING GOOD FOR EVIL

**[Proverbs 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.21-22)**

"If your enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you shall heap coals of fire upon his head; and the Lord shall reward you!" KJV

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you!" NIV

The morality both of the Old and New Testament is the same. Some have imagined, that because our blessed Lord said, "A new Commandment I give unto you," he has in his Gospel enlarged the duties of his followers beyond what was required by the moral law. But no command of his was new in itself, but only in its circumstances; as being enjoined from new principles, and illustrated by new examples. Morality does not depend on any arbitrary appointment; it arises out of the relation which we bear to God as our common Creator, and to each other as brethren; and, irrespective of any express revelation of it, "To love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves," must of necessity be the duty of every man.

Had our blessed Lord increased the demands of the moral law, either the Law must have demanded too little of us, or the Gospel must demand too much. But neither of these is the case; the requirements both of the one and of the other are the same, as far as morals are concerned. Love is acknowledged to be the fulfilling of the Law, and the great commandment of the Gospel also. But to love our enemies is the utmost extent to which this duty is carried, either in the Law or Gospel; yet is this enjoined, as we see, under the Mosaic dispensation; which is a clear proof, that it is not, as many erroneously suppose, a requirement peculiar to the Christian code. The very words of our text are cited by the Apostle Paul, as inculcating all that Christianity itself requires on this head, [Romans 12:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.19-20). Only there is one point in our text which adds greatly to its interest, and which has determined us to select the original words for our consideration, rather than the Apostle's citation of them.

From the words before us we shall be led to consider,

I. The duty inculcated.

Certainly the love of enemies was never regarded as a duty by any of the heathen philosophers. Whatever might be occasionally spoken by them in praise of magnanimity, the love of enemies, and the rendering of good for evil under all circumstances, was never admitted by them as a proper principle and rule of conduct. Such a principle is directly contrary to all our natural opinions and feelings.

By nature, we are all inclined to render evil for evil.

There is not a child that does not manifest this disposition, as soon as it begins to act. Nor is there anyone whose own experience will not furnish him with unnumbered proofs that this is the natural bent of his own heart.

Circumstances may indeed prevent us from retaliating injuries in an open way; the person that has inflicted the injuries may be out of our reach; or be too powerful for us to contend with; or be so low, as to be deemed unworthy of our notice.

But in our hearts, we shall find the vindictive principle strongly operative, disposing us to take pleasure in any evil that may have befallen our enemy, and to decline yielding any service to him, which, under the influence of a better principle, we might have rendered him.

The man under the workings of hatred scarcely thinks of his enemy but with pain, and with a direct reference to the injuries received from him; and though from lack of opportunity he may not retaliate, he has in him the spark, which might soon, by a concurrence of circumstances, break forth into a flame!

In proof of this we need only see how this spirit has operated in others; sometimes rankling for years, until an opportunity to gratify itself should offer; and sometimes bursting forth at once into furious resentment.

The sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, full of indignation against Shechem for defiling their sister Dinah, formed a plan to murder, not Shechem only, but every male of the city in which he dwelt. To put them off their guard, and disable them for resistance, they devised a most hypocritical scheme, and most infernal that could enter into the heart of man; having succeeded in which, they executed their bloody purpose without pity and without remorse, [Genesis 34:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 34.13-15); [Genesis 34:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 34.25).

In Absalom's bosom the determination to avenge the wrongs which his sister Tamar had sustained, and to expiate them by the blood of Amnon, her offending brother, rankled two full years; until by artifice he was enabled to effect his murderous design! [2 Samuel 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 13.15); [2 Samuel 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 13.28).

More rapid, but not less cruel, was the vindictive wrath of David, when Nabal had refused to recompense his services in the way he desired; he instantly hastened with an armed force to cut off Nabal, and every male belonging to his numerous household! [1 Samuel 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.21-22).

Alas! alas! what is man, when left to the workings of his own corrupt nature? His every thought accords with that Pharisaic principle, "You shall love your friend, and hate your enemy."

By **grace**, we are enabled to overcome our natural sinful bias, and render good for evil.

Every species of revenge it absolutely forbids, even in thought. "Do not say, I will do so to him, as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work! [Proverbs 24:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.29)."

To this effect were those ordinances of Moses, "You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people; but you shall love your neighbor as yourself! [Leviticus 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.18)." And, "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you must surely bring it back again to him; and if you see his donkey lying under his burden, and would forbear to help him, you shall surely help him! [Exodus 23:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.4-5)." Thus by the law of Moses the secret alienation of heart was to be counteracted by the exercise of actual kindness and benevolence.

But the words of our text are stronger still, and especially as they are cited by the Apostle Paul. The idea conveyed by him is, that we must not merely give our enemy bread and water when he needs it, but must feed him with the tenderness of a mother towards her little infant! [Romans 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.20). O what a victory does this suppose over all the vindictive feelings of our hearts!

We have a beautiful instance of this recorded in the history of Elisha. The prophet was surrounded by an army of Syrians, determined to apprehend and destroy him. By a power communicated to him from above, he smote them all with blindness, and then conducted them into the heart of Samaria. The king of Israel having gained this advantage over them, would have slain them; but the prophet said. "You shall not smite them; but shall set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master [2 Kings 6:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.21-22)." Such is the disposition which we also are called to exercise towards our most inveterate enemies. We must "bless those who curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44)." If they should have offended against us ever so often, even seventy times seven, we are still to retain the same disposition towards them, and to manifest it the very instant they express regret for the unkindness they have shown us! [Matthew 18:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.22).

Nor are there to be any other bounds to our forgiveness, than those which the Lord Jesus Christ has affixed to his; we are to forgive others "even as Christ has forgiven us! [Ephesians 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.32);" and, if we refuse to do so, our doom is sealed, "So also shall the Lord do unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses, [Matthew 18:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.35)."

Such is the duty which we are called to perform; but, that we may not be deterred by the arduousness of it, let us consider,

II. The **encouragement** given to us to perform it.

If we act thus, we have reason to hope:

1. That we shall overcome the hatred of our enemy.

Certain it is, that no enemy was ever yet won by a vindictive conduct. We may, it is true, silence him by power; but we never can gain his affections by anything but love. And this will, if not always—yet sometimes, prevail; as Paul intimates, when he says, "Do not be overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)." Indeed, where there is a spark of hypocrisy left, we cannot but hope that such benevolence as this will at last prevail.

We have some remarkable instances of this in the life of David. Saul had persecuted him with most relentless and bitter animosity; yet, when David twice had him in his power, and could easily have destroyed him, he spared his life; and by this generosity constrained his persecutor to confess his own extreme injustice, and to take shame to himself for his own malignant and cruel proceedings! [1 Samuel 24:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.4); [1 Samuel 24:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.11); [1 Samuel 24:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.16-19); [1 Samuel 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.12); 1 Samuel 26:21; [1 Samuel 26:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.25).

Such effects we also may hope to see produced on our enemies. It is well known that metals are fused, not by putting fire under them, but by heaping also coals of fire upon them; and thus shall the hard hearts of our enemies be melted by accumulated instances of undeserved love. True, we cannot convert their souls by this; for nothing but omnipotence can effect so great a work as the conversion of a soul; but we may reasonably expect to appease their wrath, perhaps also to slay their enmity against us; and one such victory will be a rich recompense for all the forbearance we have ever exercised, and all the love we have ever displayed.

2. That we shall be rewarded by our God.

This is plainly asserted in our text; and to all who conform themselves to the direction before us shall the promise be assuredly fulfilled.

It shall be fulfilled here on earth; for such conduct will bring unspeakable peace into the soul. It is said, that revenge is sweet; but with infinitely greater propriety may it be said, that the returning of good for evil is far more sweet. Revenge is a malignant pleasure, such as we may suppose Satan himself felt, when he had prevailed, as he thought, against the Lord of life and glory; but the other is such a sacred pleasure as Christ himself felt, when he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

What satisfaction did David experience, when, in consequence of Abigail's interposition, he had changed his mind in relation to Nabal, and sacrificed his resentment to a sense of duty! Again and again did he bless her for diverting him from his purpose, [1 Samuel 25:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.32-33). And we also, whenever love rises superior to resentment, and enables us to render good for evil, shall find unspeakable comfort springing up in our souls.

But the promise shall be yet more fully accomplished hereafter. Every act of patient self-denial and of generous love will be noticed by God with special approbation; and, if a cup of cold water given to a disciple for Christ's sake shall never lose its reward, then much less shall services rendered to an enemy for his sake pass unnoticed.

Peter tells us that we are called to such trials, and carried through them in a triumphant manner, on purpose "that we may inherit a blessing, [1 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.9)." But the point is repeatedly asserted by our Lord himself, "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy!" "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven! [Luke 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.37)." Let this thought occupy the mind; and the performance of the duty will be a delightful task.

ADDRESS.

1. Guard against those sinful reasonings which favor the indulgence of a vindictive spirit.

You will be sometimes inclined to think that the exercise of resentment is necessary; and that if some displeasure is not manifested, your enemies will be emboldened to proceed to still further outrages. But look at the command of God; and, if this is clearly on the side of forbearance and love, say to every contrary suggestion, "Get behind me, Satan; you are an offence unto me!"

2. Set the Lord Jesus Christ before you as your example.

There are many passages in the Psalms which seem to breathe a spirit of revenge, particularly Psalm 109; but these are frequently only prophecies, which might properly have been translated in the future tense; and when they are clearly imprecations, as sometimes they surely are, they are spoken in the person of the Messiah, who had a right either to denounce or imprecate judgments on those who obstinately rejected all the offers of his grace.

David, when speaking in his own person, manifested the same spirit that befits us, [Psalm 35:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.13-14). But David was a fallible man, like unto us; as we have seen in the case of Nabal. Look therefore to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in whom was no sin. When you were enemies, He left the bosom of his Father for you; yes, "when you were yet enemies, he died for you!" I need say no more. Set him before you, and your way will be clear; and, if you look to him for all needful support, his "grace shall be sufficient for you," and you shall be able to do all things through the strength he will impart!

#810

THE DANGER OF SELF-CONCEIT

**[Proverbs 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 26.12)**

"Do you see a man wise in his own conceit?  
 There is more hope for a fool, than for him!" KJV

"Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?  
 There is more hope for a fool than for him!" NIV

The Scripture never seeks to please the fastidious ear of man, but calls both people and things by their appropriate names. Sin is declared to be the extreme folly; and those who commit it, are proclaimed to be fools.

In the eleven verses preceding our text, the folly of fools is mentioned no less than ten times; and from this humiliating picture our text derives a force and emphasis which no single expression could give. The import of the text, as connected with the context, is this: The condition of a fool is, as you have seen, awful in the extreme; but "Do you see a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope for a fool, than for him!" This is a solemn declaration, and worthy of the deepest attention. Let us consider it,

I. As a general truth.

Here we may distinctly notice:

1. The character described.

There is in man a strange conceit, and a proneness to take very undue credit to himself for his abilities and attainments. Some are so confident in their own wisdom, that they seem to think they cannot err; and they would have it supposed that they possess, almost by intuition, what others have attained only by laborious investigation. People of this description will not condescend to examine their opinions by any test; nor will they listen to any statements that are opposed to them. Confidence is to them in the place of proof; and any attempt to controvert their opinions, excites only their indignation or contempt.

2. His hopeless condition.

Truly pitiable is the condition of "a fool." He is ignorant of all that constitutes true wisdom; he is also, in a great measure, incapable of receiving instruction; and the instruction he does receive, he is incapable of turning to a good account, or of making a suitable improvement of it.

Of such a one there certainly is but little hope; yet is the conceited person in a more hopeless state than he. If in respect of capacity he have the advantage, he labors under a tenfold disadvantage, by reason of his precipitancy, his self-confidence, his pertinacity. The endeavors used to convince him of his errors do but rivet him the more firmly in them; and opposition to him serves but to increase his obstinacy.

Thus, while the conceit of his mind indisposes him for the proper exercise of his judgment in relation to truth, it unfits him for the reception of any benefit from the wisdom of others; so that to bring him to sound wisdom and discretion is indeed a hopeless task! If he will not deliberate and weigh matters for himself, or listen to instruction and advice from others; and if the means used to rectify his views do but confirm him the more in his delusions, there is indeed no hope for him; and "You cannot separate fools from their foolishness, even though you grind them like grain with mortar and pestle! [Proverbs 27:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.22)."

The declaration in our text will be found still more weighty, if considered,

II. With a more especial reference to saving religion.

A man that carries his self-conceit into religion is indeed in a most deplorable state.

Truth, in general, is too pure and refined to obtain ready admittance into such a mind as his; but religious truth is altogether folly in his eyes! "The natural man," even though not blinded by that measure of conceit of which we have been speaking, "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, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)." But where, in addition to the natural blindness of the human mind, there is a large measure of prideful conceit, the state of that man is bad indeed; because every truth of the Gospel not only offends him, but offends him in proportion to its sublimity and importance.

The total corruption of our nature,  
the necessity of a new birth by the operation of the Spirit of God,  
justification by faith in the Lord Jesus,  
and an entire dedication of the soul to God  
—all appear to him extravagant and absurd; he sees no occasion for such humiliating and self-denying doctrines; nor will he believe them, whatever testimony be adduced from the Holy Scriptures in support of them. In vain are God's express declarations brought before him; he believes his own conceits in preference to them; and every person who would persuade him to examine with candor, he regards as a deluded fanatic. Such a person, therefore, is never likely to come to the knowledge of the truth.

But, besides the obstacles which he meets with from the sublimity of the truths, and the blindness of his own mind—he has another source of blindness peculiar to himself; for God is particularly offended by such conduct, in reference to his revealed will; and he will "give such a one up to his own delusions to believe a lie! [2 Thessalonians 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.11-12)," and to harden himself in his impenitence and unbelief; and if once a man has provoked God so to withdraw his Holy Spirit from him, and to surrender him up to the power of sin and Satan, he will never be undeceived, until he shall open his eyes in the eternal world!

The fool then, I say, is in a more hopeful state than he!

The fool, notwithstanding his ignorance, may learn; and if he will only submit himself to divine teaching, he shall learn. Nor shall his weakness be any bar to his instruction; for God has said, that "What he has hidden from the wise and prudent, he has, of his own good pleasure, revealed unto babes! [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26);" and so plain shall his ways be made to them, that "a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein! [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8)." Of the fool, then, we may have a hope, because he will use the appointed means of instruction, and will embrace truth as far as he discerns it. But the conceited man will not condescend to be "taught of God," and therefore must continue ignorant even to the end, and "perish at last for lack of knowledge!"

On this subject I would found a general exhortation.

Self-conceit, when strongly manifested in relation to earthly things, generally excites pity and contempt; but when exercised in reference to spiritual things, is deemed good and wise. But I entreat all to be on their guard against it. It is most dangerous and fatal to the soul. Humility is at the very root of divine knowledge; nor can any saving acquaintance with the Gospel spring up without it.

This, then, I say to all:

Be sensible, that, instead of being "rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing," as too many suppose themselves to be, you are in yourselves wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked! [Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17)."

Bear in mind, that the Scriptures alone are the fountain and standard of truth. Everything must be brought "to the Law and to the testimony;" and "whoever speaks not according to the written word, he has no light in him! [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20)."

Remember, too, that it is only by divine teaching that we can understand the Scriptures! If the eyes of our understanding are not enlightened by the Spirit of God, notwithstanding the light that shines around us—then we shall go on still in darkness, even as Paul did, in his unconverted state; and as the twelve Apostles did, in the midst of all their Master's instructions, until after the resurrection of their Lord, [Ephesians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18). [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45).

And do not forget, that this instruction must be sought by earnest prayer. God alone can give it; and it is only in answer to prayer that he will impart it to us, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6).

Moreover, after you have been guided into truth, you must still be on your guard against the same propensity which acts so powerfully in the unconverted mind. Many, after all their partial illumination, are drawn aside after "philosophy and vain deceit! [Colossians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.8)." If you would be preserved in the right way, you must not only "be converted, and become as little children," but retain a childlike simplicity even to the end. To your last hour you need to be reminded of that counsel given to the Christians at Rome, "Do not be wise in your own conceit! [Romans 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.16)." You need to be guarded against "thinking that you know anything" perfectly; for, while you are under such an impression, "you know nothing yet as you ought to know! [1 Corinthians 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.2)." "If you will be truly wise, it is by becoming fools in your own estimation, that you are to be made wise! [1 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.18)." If you will not follow this counsel, "God will take you in your own craftiness! [1 Corinthians 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.19-20)."

I must then, as God's ambassador to you, call your attention to the warning which he has given you by the prophet Isaiah, "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! [Isaiah 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.21)." And to all I must recommend those petitions of God's most favored saints, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your Law! [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18);" and, "What I see not, Teach me! [Job 34:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.32)."

#811

A CAUTION AGAINST DEPENDING UPON FUTURE TIME

**[Proverbs 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.1)**

"Boast not yourself of tomorrow; for you know not what a day may bring forth." KJV

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth!" NIV

The opinions of men are not less opposite to the mind of God in what relates to practice, than in the most mysterious doctrines of our holy religion. We are told, that "the things of the Spirit are esteemed as foolishness by the natural man;" and to what an extent they are so, is visible in the commendation universally given to a worldly spirit, and in the contempt poured upon heavenly-mindedness—as though it were the offspring of folly and wild enthusiasm. But in the judgment of God there is no truer mark of wisdom than to consider earthly things as transient and worthless, and to place one's-self continually as on the brink and precipice of eternity! To this effect Solomon speaks in the passage before us; in discoursing on which, we shall,

I. **Explain** the caution here given.

It is of great importance to distinguish between providing for tomorrow, and presuming upon tomorrow:

Providing for tomorrow necessary for our very existence, since without it, the whole world would be in a state of stagnation.

But the acting as if we were certain of another day, is the error against which we are cautioned.

1. We presume upon tomorrow, when our affections are inordinately set upon present things.

If we feel eager desires after any earthly thing, so as to envy the possessors of it, and account the attainment of it necessary to our happiness;  
or, if we take such delight in what we do possess, as to forget that this world is not our rest, and that infinitely higher joys are prepared for us above;  
or if we grieve exceedingly on account of some loss we have sustained  
—then we manifest that we have been promising ourselves many days, and even years to come; for, would a person be very solicitous about a vanity that he thought might very probably last but a day? Or would he so congratulate himself on a possession which he apprehended to be of such short continuance? Or would he lay so much to heart the loss of anything which he had expected to enjoy but a little time?

We cannot but see that in proportion as he was impressed with a sense of the shortness and uncertainty of time, and its nothingness in comparison with eternity—his affections would be moderated towards every object of time and sense; he would "rejoice as though he rejoiced not, and weep as though he wept not, and use everything as not abusing it."

2. We presume upon tomorrow, when we are but little interested about eternal things.

Everyone knows that sin must be repented of; and that, if we die under the guilt of sin, then we must surely perish.

But this is not all; we must be born again and be made new creatures in Christ Jesus; and though this is not generally understood, every one has an idea that he must become religious before he dies, if he would find acceptance with God in the world to come.

Now if people are deferring the great work of religion—then whence can that delay arise but from their expectation of some more convenient season, when they shall execute their purposes of reformation and amendment? Or if they commit sin, whence can they be emboldened to do so, but from a secret confidence that they shall live to repent of it; and to rectify what they know to be amiss?

Would any man deliberately do what he knows must be undone, or leave undone what he knows he must do in order to his eternal salvation—if he were assured that he had not one day more to live? And would not the probable nearness of death influence him in like manner in proportion as it was felt?

The whole world standing greatly in need of this caution, we proceed to,

II. **Enforce** the caution here given.

The reason urged by Solomon commends itself immediately to our hearts and consciences.

1. We know not what shall be on the morrow.

Today we perhaps are enjoying all that our hearts can wish; our bodies are rigorous, our spirits mirthful, our friends numerous, our means of gratification greatly diversified, and accessible at all times.

Tomorrow we may be cast down from our pinnacle of happiness; our honor may be laid in the dust; we may be languishing on a bed of sickness; and deprived of all the comforts of life; and our reverse of fortune may be yet further aggravated by the loss of all our friends.

The case of Job, if more recent instances were lacking, would sufficiently show what may happen to us all! Job 1.

See, in spiritual concerns, the case of David. [Psalm 30:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.6-7).

Shall we then be promising ourselves years of happiness in the enjoyment of earthly things, when we consider how unstable they are?

Again; today we are sinning in expectation that we shall, at some future period, repent. Tomorrow possibly we may, like Nebuchadnezzar, be deprived of reason; or, like Pharaoh, be sealed up by God under final impenitence!

Now is it not madness to risk the salvation of our souls upon the hope of having everything that can conduce to our eternal welfare continued to us to the latest period of our lives? Should we not rather set ourselves to redeem the present time, and to "work while it is day, lest the night should come wherein no man can work! [Ephesians 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.16). [John 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.4)."

2. We know not whether we shall even live to see the morrow.

What man is there that has "made a covenant with death, and an agreement with the grave" so as to be assured he shall live another day? Has he this assurance:  
from within himself,  
or from those around him,  
or from God?

Not from within himself, since neither youth nor health is any security against the stroke of death!

Not from others, since physicians, however useful in their place, can afford us no help, when God shall call away our souls.

Not from God; for though he promised to protract Hezekiah's life for fifteen years, he has not engaged to preserve our life so many minutes.

If, with the Rich Man in the Gospel we are saying, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years," God may say to us, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you! [Luke 12:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.19-20)."

Who then, that knows the uncertainty of life, will presume upon its continuance? Let us look at the many thousands who, though but lately they seemed as likely to live as ourselves, are gone into eternity; gone too, before they had prepared to give up their account to God; and surely we shall cry with the Psalmist, "Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may instantly apply our hearts unto wisdom! [Psalm 90:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.12)."

This subject naturally leads us to **address**,

1. The **careless**.

Is it not sufficient that God has exercised such long-suffering towards you, but will you still continue to provoke him? [James 4:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.13-16). "O be wise, and consider your latter end." "Today, while it is called today, harden not your hearts;" lest while you are saying, "Peace and safety!" sudden destruction comes upon you! [Hebrews 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-8); [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13). [1 Thessalonians 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.3).

2. The **lukewarm**.

Lukewarmness in religion is as odious to God as an utter neglect of it, [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16). It is not by a round of formal duties, but a strenuous exertion of all your powers that you are to obtain the prize; for though Heaven is the gift of God through Christ, it is bestowed on only those who labor for it, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27). Whatever then your hand finds to do, do it with all your might! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10).

3. The **zealous**.

Endeavor to realize more and more the uncertainty of life, that, like the Apostle, you may "die daily." And, as you know not but that on the morrow you may be numbered with the saints in glory, let nothing be deferred until tomorrow, which you can do for God today. Thus will death, however sudden, be welcome to you!

#812

ENVY

**[Proverbs 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.4)**

"Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming; but who can stand before envy?"

Man is an enemy to his fellow man; nor is there anyone who does not on some occasion experience reason for this complaint. But, if some find means of aggression, others obtain means of defense:  
some in their own powers;  
others in the assistance of friends;  
others in the arm of the law;  
others, where all these powers fail them, derive a measure of consolation from submission or flight.

The most "cruel wrath, and most outrageous anger," may, by one or other of these means, be withstood, or tolerated, or escaped. But there is one weapon from which there is no flight, and against which there is no protection; and that is, envy! "Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming; but who can stand before envy?"

In order to bring the subject of envy fully before you, I will show,

I. Consider the **odiousness** of envy!

1. The **nature** of envy.

Envy, as existing in the soul, is a sense of pain arising from the real or supposed excellence of another, accompanied with a desire to deprive him of it, and to possess it ourselves. The excellence may be either natural or acquired. Any faculty of body or mind which renders a man estimable in the world is a proper object for envy to fix upon, and against which to direct its poison arows. So, in like manner, any attainment of wealth or honor will call forth envy's malignant efforts against the person in whom such a distinction has been found, especially if the distinction so obtained has been an object of desire to the person beholding it, and apparently within his reach; for envy finds scope for operation only between people among whom some kind of rivalry exists. A peasant does not envy either a king or a philosopher; because the dignity of the one, and the wisdom of the other—are altogether beyond a hope, I had almost said a possibility, of his attainment. Envy includes in it a desire of the distinction that calls it forth, and a pain of seeing it possessed by another, when by possibility it might have been possessed by one's-self.

2. The **odiousness** of envy.

Nothing excites envy but what is either really, or in the person's estimation, good; nor does envy ever exert itself, but for the destruction of the happiness of him in whom that good is found.

It is the happiness of another, that gives pain to the envious man!

The destruction of the other's happiness is the great object that would afford him pleasure.

Envy's actings, indeed, are not open, like those of wrath and anger; on the contrary, they are as secret as possible; and they put on, as far as possible, a subtle garb, a garb of candor and of equity. But its inseparable attendants are of the same odious character with itself; namely, "quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder, [2 Corinthians 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.20)."

Indeed, envy is very nearly allied to murder; for, as it is invariably connected with, anger, envy is murder in embryo! [1 John 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.15); and hence in the Scriptures it is generally associated with murder, "The works of the flesh," says the Apostle, are hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, [Galatians 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.20-21);" and in another place he says of unconverted men, that they are "full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters," and so on, [Romans 1:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.29-30).

It indeed may appear harsh to load this principle of envy with such horrid accusations; but they are true, and all verified by experience.

Why did Cain slay his brother? it was because he saw his brother receiving from God tokens of approbation which were denied to him, [Galatians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.5); [Galatians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.8).

And whence was it that Joseph's brethren took counsel to slay him? it was on account of his enjoying higher favor with his father than they, and his receiving more remarkable communications from God, [Genesis 37:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.11); [Genesis 37:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.18-20).

But, in truth, we do not view this principle aright, unless we see in envy the very image of the devil himself. No other principle in the heart of man bears so strong a resemblance of the devil as envy. See our first parents in Paradise, as happy as it was possible for creatures in a state of probation to be. The devil saw and envied them their bliss, and never rested until he had robbed them of it! [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3). Nor does he behold one of their descendants turning to the Lord, without using every effort in his power to divert them from their purpose, and to destroy their souls! [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8).

And what does he gain by this? Is he himself rendered happier by depriving others of their bliss? No! he only augments his own guilt and misery! And yet such is the malignity of his disposition, that he can find no employment to his mind but this; and, so far as he is capable of a momentary mitigation of his pains, he finds it only in robbing man of his happiness, and God of his glory. This is the very character of the envious man, whose "wisdom," as James says, "is not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish! [James 3:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.14-16)."

The fact is, that so odious is this principle in the estimation of the whole world, that there is not to be found on earth a person who will acknowledge himself to be actuated by it; though the real truth is, that there is not an unconverted man in the whole universe who is not, as I shall have presently to show, under its pernicious influence. But the very circumstance of all people disavowing it, while they will readily acknowledge that they are led captive by pride, or anger—is sufficient to show how odious it is in itself, and how despicable in the eyes of every living man!

The evil of envy will yet more strongly appear, while I show,

II. Consider the **destructiveness** of envy!

There is not a person in the universe able to stand before envy.

The workings of envy are inconceivably subtle.

People are not always aware what principle it is which stirs within them, when they are under its influence. Joshua conceived that he was only showing a commendable regard for the honor of Moses, when he desired that Eldad and Medad, who were prophesying in the camp, should be silenced. But Moses reproved him, saying. "Do you envy for my sake? Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets! [Numbers 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.29)." And surely those who, in order to grieve the Apostle Paul, preached Christ out of envy and strife [Philippians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.15), gave themselves credit for a purer motive in their performance of that duty.

There are a variety of ways by which men contrive to hide their envy from themselves. They see some evil in the conduct which they blame; or, if it was not evil in itself, it was faulty in the time, or manner, or measure, in which it was done; or, if no fault attach to it in any of those respects, it was from an improper motive. In short, something shall be found in everything that a person does, either to make it appear blame-worthy, or, at all events, to abate its excellence; and the person judging of these things will not openly condemn them, but only utter praise in a fainter tone, and in more qualified terms, so that the measure of praise accorded to the agent may be diminished, and his merits be comparatively obscured. This, to the person forming the judgment, shall appear only strict justice; but God, who sees the heart, will designate it envy.

Envy finds an advocate in every bosom.

There is in all a wish to be exalted among their equals; and it there is any person who has raised themselves by their own merits above the common standard, then every mind will be gratified with hearing of something which shall divest them of their imputed excellence, and reduce them to their former level. Hence the envious man finds an ally in every bosom, and a readiness in all around him to listen to any representation that is of an unfavorable nature; because every person seems to himself elevated in proportion as others are put down.

The means of misrepresentation are infinite in number; and if every statement were carefully investigated before it was received, a man of wisdom and discretion might defy them all; but when every misrepresentation that envy can suggest is listened to with pleasure, and received without inquiry—then who must not fall before it?

The more excellent any conduct is, the more liable it is to envy's assaults.

Even piety itself is not beyond its reach; for Solomon speaks of it as a peculiar vanity and source of vexation, that "for every right work, a man is envied of his neighbor. [Ecclesiastes 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 4.4)."

To say the truth, piety is more the object of envy than anything else; not because others affect it for themselves, but because, in the common opinions of mankind, it gives to its possessor a transcendent excellence, and raises him almost into a higher order of beings.

This was a peculiar source of Cain's resentment against his brother Abel, [1 John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.12); as it was of Saul's against David, [Psalm 38:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.20); and of the Jews against Christ himself! [John 8:45-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.45-48). "For he (Pilate) knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him! [Matthew 27:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.18)."

Take an act of Christ's, the restoring of Lazarus from the grave; a more benevolent act could not be conceived, nor one which more strongly carried its evidence of a divine mission along with it. Was it possible for envy or enmity to be provoked by that? Yes! The very act instantly produced a conspiracy against the life of Jesus; against the life, too, of the man who had been raised by him! [John 8:45-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.45-48); [John 8:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.53); [John 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.10-11). Was it so, then, that all the wisdom, or piety, or benevolence of our blessed Savior himself could not elude this detestable enemy of God and man? No; not even he could stand before it; but, as the Evangelist informs us, he fell a prey to its insatiate rage! [Matthew 27:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.18); [Matthew 27:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.20). Against all his disciples, too, envy raged in like manner, [Acts 13:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.44-45); [Acts 17:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.4-5); [Acts 17:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.10-14). In the same way, it is in vain for anyone, who will serve God with fidelity, to hope for an escape from envy's virulent assaults [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12).

Methinks you are now prepared to hear,

III. Consider the **damning effects** of envy!

God has marked his indignation against envy even here on earth.

Greatly does this principle embitter the life of him in whom it dwells. Its operation is not momentary, like that of anger. Envy lurks in the bosom; it corrodes the mind; it makes a man completely miserable. We may see its operation in Saul. Saul heard the women, out of all the cities of Israel, celebrating the praises of himself and of David, "As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. 1 Samuel 18:7-12.

This may enable us to understand what Solomon meant, when he called "envy, the rottenness of the bones, [Proverbs 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.30)." For as the corporeal system must be altogether enfeebled and destroyed when the bones are rotten; so the moral constitution of the soul is rendered one entire mass of corruption, when a man lies under the dominion of this hateful principle of envy! He is, in fact, as near to the consummation of his misery in Hell as the other is to the termination of his life on earth.

But who can tell with what judgments it shall be visited in the eternal world?

It is not possible that a person under the dominion of envy should ever behold the face of God in peace. "God is love;" love is his very nature and essence; but envy is hatred in its most hateful form, as terminating upon an object—not for any evil that is in him, but for the good which he manifests, and for the success he meets with in the exercise of what is good.

How can two such opposites meet together? As well might light and darkness coalesce, as God and an envious man delight in each other in Heaven. It is said in God's blessed Word, that "without charity, whatever we possess, or do, or suffer for God—we are only as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3)." But in that very place we are told, that "love does not envy! 1 Corinthians 13:4." What, then, are we to infer from this, but that, as envy proves an entire lack of charity, so it proves, equally and unquestionably, a state of mind that is wholly incompatible with the favor of God and the felicity of Heaven.

But, that we may be assured of God's indignation against it, let us see what God said to Edom by the Prophet Ezekiel, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will treat you in accordance with the anger and envy you showed in your hatred of them, and I will make myself known among them when I judge you! [Ezekiel 35:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 35.11)." True indeed it is, that in this passage God is only denouncing temporal judgments; but it amply shows what are his opinions respecting envy, and what will be his judgment upon it in the day that he shall judge the world.

Having thus exposed, in some measure, the true character of envy, I beg permission to suggest to you some cautions in relation to it. Be careful,

1. Be careful to never needlessly **excite** envy.

Knowing, as you do, how common an evil envy is, and how deeply rooted in the heart of man—you should guard against everything which may call it into action. Whatever you possess, either of natural or acquired excellence—do not make an ostentatious display of it; but rather put a veil over it, as it were, that its radiance may not offend the eyes of those who behold you. The less value you appear to put upon your attainments, and the less you arrogate to yourselves on account of them, the less will others be disposed to grudge you the enjoyment of them, and to despoil you of the honor due to them.

It was unwise in Jacob to mark his partiality towards his son Joseph, by "a coat of many colors;" and he paid dearly for it by this sufferings it entailed. For your own sakes therefore, as well as for the sake of others, it will be wise for you to bear your honors meekly, and to show that you are "little in your own eyes."

2. Be careful to never wickedly to **indulge** envy.

Envy is a principle in our fallen nature—far more powerful than men in general are apt to imagine. "Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy? [James 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.5). See also [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3)." If you will watch the motions of your own hearts, you will find a sad propensity to envy, whenever a powerful occasion arises to call it forth. Suppose a person, whom you have regarded as inferior to yourself in industry and talent, has got ahead of you, and attained a higher eminence than you in your own peculiar line; are you not ready to ascribe his success to chance, or to the partiality of friends, rather than to his own intrinsic merit? And would it not be gratifying to you to hear a similar judgment passed on him by others?

Suppose he were by any means to fall from his eminence; would not his degradation give you pleasure? If you praise him, is it with the same decisive tone as you would have wished for, if the praise had been conferred on you? It is when your own honor or interest comes in competition with that of another, that envy betrays its power over you; and if you have been observant of the workings of your own mind and heart, you will be no strangers to the operation of this principle within you.

But remember what has been said of the odiousness and enormity of envy; and cry mightily to God to deliver you from its pernicious influence. Remember how transitory is all distinction here on earth; and content yourselves with the honor which comes from God, and will endure forever.

3. Be careful to never basely to **fear** envy.

Though you are not to make an ostentatious display of any excellence you may possess, and especially of piety—you are not to put your light under a bushel, through the fear of any hostility which a discovery of it may provoke. Whatever your duty is, whether to God or man, that you are to do; and to leave all consequences to the disposal of God's all-wise Providence. It should be in your mind "a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment, 1 Corinthians 4:3."

If you have "the testimony of your own conscience that you are serving God in simplicity and godly sincerity"—that should bear you up against all the obloquy that the envy or malignity of others can heap upon you. You must expect that "those who render evil for good will be against you, if you follow the thing that is good;" and you must commit yourself to Him who judges rightly, and who will, in due season, both vindicate your character, and make your righteousness to shine forth as the noon-day!

4. Be careful to never angrily **resent** envy.

Supposing you to be traduced and injured in a variety of ways, "what temptation has befallen you, but that which is common to men?" Instead of grieving that you are persecuted for righteousness sake, you should rather regard the hatred of men as a homage paid to your virtue; and should "rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake."

You will remember the prayer of our blessed Lord for his murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." This is the pattern which it befits you to follow. Your envious neighbors really do not know what they are doing; they are not aware by what spirit they are actuated, or what evil they commit. Instead, therefore, of being angry with them for the evil they do to you, you should rather pity them for the evil they do to themselves.

This was the way in which David requited Saul, sparing him when he had him in his power, and mourning for him when he was removed to another world, [1 Samuel 24:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.9-11); [1 Samuel 24:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.16-18) and [2 Samuel 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 1.17); [2 Samuel 1:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 1.24-27). Your rule, under all circumstances, must be this, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)

#813

THE HEARTS OF MEN ALIKE

**[Proverbs 27:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.19)**

"As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man." KJV

"As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man." NIV

There are many things which are justly considered as axioms of a truth of which we are fully convinced, because they are the result of observation and experience; yet, being declared also by the voice of inspiration, they come to our minds with authority, and demand from us an unhesitating acquiescence. Such is the truth which we have just read from the Book of Proverbs.

Any man conversant with the world, knows that human nature is, to a certain degree, the same in every age and in every place. But there are, among men, so many discrepancies arising out of incidental circumstances, and so many changes in the same people, that if the heart-searching God himself had not determined the point, we should scarcely have ventured to speak respecting it in terms so strong and unqualified as Solomon has used in the passage before us. His words, beyond all doubt, are true; but yet, if not well understood, they are capable of much misapprehension and perversion. In discoursing upon them, I will:

I. **Explain** Solomon's assertion.

It needs explanation; for if we were to take it as importing that all men in all circumstances manifest the same dispositions and desires—then it would be the very reverse of what we see and know to be true. It is evident, that, though Solomon does not make any distinction, he does not intend to confound all people in one common mass, and to affirm that, under all their diversified conditions, they are all alike; he supposes that, among the people so compared, there exists a similarity, which may render them proper objects of comparison.

1. Solomon takes for granted that there is in them a similarity of **age**.

If we take men in the various stages of human existence, from infancy to old age, we know that there exists in them a vast diversity of sentiment. To imagine that among them all, that there should be found the same views, desires, and pursuits—would be to betray an ignorance and folly bordering on absurdity. Old men and children can no more be supposed to accord with each other in such respects, than light and darkness.  
Children must be compared with children;  
young men must be compared with youths; and  
old men must be compared with those that are advanced in years.

2. Solomon takes for granted that there is in them a similarity of **character**.

There is in the natural constitution of men a great difference. Infants at their mother's bosom display an astonishing variety of character; some being mild, gentle, placid; others, on the contrary, being filled with the most violent and hateful dispositions.

Education, too, will operate very forcibly on men, and lead them to habits widely different from each other. One who is brought up in the unrestrained indulgence of every vicious appetite, cannot be supposed to resemble one who has been well instructed in all virtuous principles, and subjected to all beneficial restraints.

Still less can the godly and the ungodly be supposed to agree. Divine grace puts men far asunder, and induces opinions and conduct widely different from any that are found in unconverted men.

In comparing these different people, a due respect must be had to their several characters; or else our judgment concerning them will be extremely erroneous.

3. Solomon takes for granted that there is in them a similarity of **condition**.

What community of sentiment, generally speaking, can there be between a prince and a peasant? Or what between an unlettered countryman and a sage philosopher? Take a man under the pressure of disease, poverty, disgrace—and what will you expect to find in him that accords with the feelings of one who is living in the fullest enjoyment of ease, and opulence, and honor? Look at even the same person, when, either in a way of elevation or depression, he is changed from the one condition to the other; and you will find in him, for the most part, a corresponding change of views and habits.

I say then, that, to apprehend our text aright, we must consider it as declaring, not that all people, whatever their circumstances may be, are alike; but that all people under the same circumstances, due allowance being made for any difference existing from constitution, age, education, habit and grace—will be found to bear a very strong resemblance to each other.

Taking the assertion of Solomon in this qualified sense, I proceed to,

II. **Confirm** his assertion.

The reflection of a countenance from water will bear a strict resemblance to him whose countenance it is. And a similar correspondence will be found between the hearts of men, who, according to the foregoing limitations, are fit objects of comparison.

1. A resemblance will be found in all who are in an **unsaved state**.

All unsaved men resemble each other in this—they supremely desire the things of time and sense. In this also resemble each other—they dislike spiritual and eternal things. Here we may range through all the gradations of men, from the prince to the peasant; and through all their ages, from infancy to old age; yes, and through all the different periods of time, from the beginning of the world to the present hour; and we shall not find so much as one differing from the rest. The testimony of Almighty God is this, "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. The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can it be! [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5); [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7)." Here both of these points are asserted, with equal clearness, and with unquestionable authority.

If the point is doubted, look for a person who, from his youth up, has shown a superiority to the pleasures, honors, interests of this world, and sought his happiness in communion with God, and in the exercises of prayer and praise. Alas! not one such person will you find! The hearts of all have been in perfect agreement with each other, even as the face that is reflected, with the face that inspects the mirror.

2. A resemblance will be found in all who are **awakened** to a sense of their perishing condition.

Let but the eyes of anyone be opened to see his real state before God, and he will begin immediately to tremble before God. No sense of earthly dignity will uphold a man at that hour. Felix on the throne of judgment, and Belshazzar in his drunken carousals, become as weak as other men; and manifest the convictions of their mind, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Not the most obdurate sinners in the universe can any longer defy the arm of divine justice; the very instant they see themselves liable to its stroke, their spirits sink within them. Even the murderers of our blessed Lord, while yet their hands were reeking with his blood, cry out in agony of mind, "Men and brethren, what shall we do? [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37)."

In another thing, too, they all agree; they all, without exception, seek, in the first instance, to conciliate God's favor by some works of their own. They will repent; they will reform their lives; they will perform the duties which they have hitherto neglected; they will exercise benevolence to the utmost of their power; they will do anything, if by any means they may recommend themselves to God as objects of his mercy. Those among them who have been somewhat better instructed, will allow to Jesus Christ the honor of saving them; but still they must do something to entitle them to come to him, and to warrant their hope in him.

None, in the first instance, see, nor, if they were instructed, would they approve, the Gospel method of salvation, simply by faith in Christ. To renounce every kind and degree of hope in themselves is, to their proud hearts, an act of humiliation, to which they cannot submit. They think, so entirely to set aside good works, is to disparage them, and to approve a neglect of them; and therefore they cannot cast themselves wholly and entirely on the merits of a crucified Redeemer. This reluctance to glorify Christ in the salvation of sinners, is indeed, overcome sooner in some than in others; and in this respect "the publicans and harlots for the most part enter into the kingdom sooner than the Scribes and Pharisees, [Matthew 21:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.31)," because they are sooner convinced that they have nothing of their own to rely upon; but in all is there the same tendency to establish a righteousness of their own, and a difficulty in being brought to "submit to the righteousness of Christ, [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-33); [Romans 10:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.1-3)."

3. A resemblance will be found in all who are **truly converted** to Christ.

To every truly converted man, without exception, "Christ is precious," even preciousness itself! [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7). Can you find one true convert to whom Jesus is not "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely? [Song of Solomon 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.10); [Song of Solomon 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16)." You might as well look for one in Heaven itself, as on earth! It is not possible to have "tasted how gracious He is," and not love him, and serve him, and glory in him!

Equally characteristic also of the true believer is the love of holiness. Sin is no longer that pleasant morsel which they would roll under their tongue; it is hateful and abominable in their eyes; and they would gladly have it crucified within them. The divine image is that which they now desire; and after which they pant, as the deer after the water-brooks.

In all, indeed, these marks are not alike visible, because all are not alike gracious; but in all, according to their measure of the grace of Christ, is holiness found. But if there is a professor of religion in whom no holiness is found, I do not hesitate to say, that he does not belong to Christ, but must take both his name and portion with the hypocrites!

Of course, when I speak of the love of holiness, I comprehend it in all its parts, and consider it as extending equally to both the tablets of the Law. The man who has a scriptural hope in the Lord Jesus Christ will not fail to "purify himself, even as Christ is pure! [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

APPLICATION

1. This subject is of real and important use, for our **humiliation**.

See the portrait of human nature as drawn in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. See it as again exhibited in [Romans 3:10-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-19): "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."

"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips."

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know."

"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God!"

Take this looking-glass then, brethren, and behold your own faces in it; and say whether you have any reason for self-admiration and self-delight? The true character of your hearts is this, "They are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9)." If there is any superiority in the conduct of any, you owe it, not to the superior quality of your hearts, but to the preventing and assisting grace of God! And the best among you may look upon the vilest of the human race and say, 'Such a one might I have been, but for the grace of God!'

2. This subject is of real and important use, for our **consolation**.

When under peculiar temptations, we are ready to think that there is no one like us, and that no one was ever tempted as we are. But "there has no temptation taken anyone of us, but what is common to man, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)." And when we know this, it is a rich source of consolation to us. Not that the trials of others can do us any good; every man must bear his own burden, whether it is greater or less; but, when a man supposes that he alone is subjected to any peculiar trouble, he is ready to imagine that he is an outcast from the Lord, and that there is no hope for him in God.

The removal of this painful apprehension, however, raises him from his dejection, and emboldens him to maintain the conflict with all the enemies of his salvation. He will then chide himself, and say, "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)."

3. This subject is of real and important use, for our **encouragement**.

If in the Scriptures we see what human nature is, we see also what divine grace is, and what it can effect in the heart of man! After a most horrible description given by the Apostle, of people who were to be excluded from the kingdom of Heaven, he says to the Corinthians, "And such were some of you; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God! [1 Corinthians 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.10-11)."

And the change wrought on the day of Pentecost, on the murderers of our Lord, abundantly shows what may be expected by all who believe on him. The same holy joy shall animate their souls; and the same Almighty power renovate them after the divine image. It was to Christians scattered throughout the world that Peter said, "Through believing in Christ, they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving even now the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls! [1 Peter 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8-9)."

What, then, may not we also expect, if we truly believe in Christ! Truly, as in water face answers to face, so shall our hearts respond to the hearts of the primitive saints, in all that is good and great. Our victories shall be the same as theirs, as shall also be our triumphs and our joys. Let this encourage us to go forward in our heavenly way, expecting assuredly that we in due time shall "see the good of God's chosen ones, and rejoice in their gladness, and glory in their inheritance, [Psalm 106:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.5)."

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THE INFLUENCE AND EFFECTS OF PIETY AND IMPIETY IN THE WORLD

**[Proverbs 28:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.4)**

"They that forsake the Law, praise the wicked; but such as keep the Law, contend with them." KJV

"Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law resist them." NIV

Man, as a social being, has an influence on those around him; and his actions should be considered, not merely as they affect himself, but, in their social aspect, as tending to make an impression upon the minds of others. In this point of view, a great measure of responsibility attaches to us, far beyond what, at first sight, we would be ready to imagine. Our good or evil conduct operates as an example, and approves a similar conduct in others; so that, in our daily actions, we, though unconscious of it, are doing good or evil to an unknown extent. This is proclaimed in the words before us, "They that forsake the Law, praise the wicked; but such as keep the Law, contend with them."

From these words I shall be led to show the effects of piety and impiety on the surrounding world.

I. The effects of IMPIETY on the surrounding world.

Whatever be men's line of conduct, they must, of necessity, "have pleasure in those who pursue the same, [Romans 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.32)." Those they will of course choose for their companions; and if for no other reason—yet in their own vindication they will approve of and applaud their ways. The proud will commend the proud, and "call them happy [Malachi 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.15);" as will the worldling also "bless the covetous, whom God abhors [Psalm 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.3)."

Indeed, it may be laid down as a general rule, that if only you "do well to yourself," by studying your own ease, interest, and honor—then "all men will praise you" as wise, and worthy of imitation, [Psalm 49:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.18). It is a matter of course that "the world will love its own [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)."

This, however, is a very partial view of our text; the true sense of which lies much deeper. The praise which an ungodly man will give to those who are like himself, is bestowed not only occasionally with the lips, but uniformly and without intermission in the life. A man who refuses submission to the will of God, and "forsakes his Word," does by that very act clearly declare to all around him:

1. By his life and example, the ungodly declare that obedience to God's Law is unnecessary.

He will acknowledge the Scriptures to be a revelation from God; and would be greatly offended, if his belief in that revelation were questioned. But his faith in Scripture is nothing more than a speculative assent; he regards not the authority of God in it; and by his contempt of that authority he says, in fact, that a submission to it is unnecessary.

The language of the heart and of the life is interpreted in this way by God himself, "You have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord Almighty! [Malachi 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.14). "And this construction is just; for what a man avows to be unnecessary for himself, he must be understood as maintaining to be unnecessary for others.

2. By his life and example, the ungodly declare that not even the Gospel itself entails any obligation upon us.

Many who profess to believe the Gospel, and to make it the ground of their hope towards God—yet feel no constraining influence from all its wonders of love and mercy. They practically say, 'True, the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, and "died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, 1 Peter 3:18." But what has this to do with the regulation of our lives? We need not be "brought to God" in this world; it will be quite sufficient to be brought to him in the world to come; and we may be sure, even from this very mercy given unto us, that God will accept us, even though no change shall have taken place in our hearts and lives. He has sent his Son indeed, as we are told, "to bless us, in turning every one of us from our iniquities, [Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26);" but we need not be anxious about experiencing any such effect of the Redeemer's mission; we may live to ourselves, and obtain his favor, as effectually and as certainly as if we lived entirely for him.'

3. By his life and example, the ungodly declare that the way of wickedness is preferable as it respects this present world.

Finding pleasure only in the things of time and sense himself, he encourages the same worldly taste in others. For, for what end "has God given us all things richly to enjoy," if we are not to enjoy them?

As for a compliance with the precepts of Scripture:

It is obvious that it must require continual self-denial; and what happiness can there be in that?

It must detach us, also, from those who are most able and willing to administer to our happiness; and how can that operate, but to our disadvantage?

As for repentance, and holy exercises of every kind—they may be very good in a dying hour; but to a person in health they can be a source of nothing but gloom and melancholy.

Thus he sanctions the ungodly in the whole of their conduct, and encourages them in all the delusions by which they are misled.

4. By his life and example, the ungodly declare that there is no punishment from God in the world to come.

This necessarily follows from all the rest; for, if he really thought that God would execute his threatenings against the violators of the Word, he would be more attentive to his own ways. But he persuades himself that God is too merciful to punish anyone in the eternal world; or, at all events, for such slight offences as he commits; and, by his open contempt of God's threatened judgments, he says to all around him, that they have nothing to fear, since "the Lord will do neither good nor evil. [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)."

The exact description of these people is given by the Psalmist, when he says, "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." His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue! [Psalm 10:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-7)."

The very reverse of this is the influence of the godly.

II. The effects of PIETY on the surrounding world.

The man who forsakes the Word, praises the wicked; but the man who keeps the Law, contends with them. He does this,

1. By the silent testimony of his life.

A godly man is like "a light shining in a dark place." However unobtrusive his conduct may be—it forms a contrast with that of all around him, and especially with that of those who move in his sphere of life.

If he is young, his sobriety is a reproach to all the giddiness and folly of his youthful acquaintances.

If he is of a more advanced age, his zeal for God reproves the worldliness and indifference of his most respected neighbors.

Whether we view his abstinence from sin, or his practice of holiness—he equally casts reflections on the great mass of mankind.

"They are of the world, and speak of the world. He is of God, and both speaks and acts for God, [1 John 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.5-6)."

"He is not conformed to the world" in any of its vanities, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2).

"He comes out from the world, and is separate; and will not so much as touch the impure thing! [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17)."

He endeavors so to walk in the world, as to "keep his garments clean, [Revelation 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.15)," and undefiled with any of the world's abominations.

He is even "crucified to the world, and regards it as a man would who was suspended on a cross, and looking for a speedy death, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

At the same time he gives himself to holy exercises; and determines, with God's help, to fulfill every duty, as in the presence of his God. He shows:  
that he has other views, other desires, other pursuits, than the world has any conception of;  
that he belongs to another world;  
that his citizenship is in Heaven; [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20);"  
and that, "though in the world, he is not of the world, even as the Lord Jesus Christ was not of the world! [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16)."

Now all this, of necessity, attracts notice, and constrains all who behold him to say, "If he is right—then we must be wrong." The effect of his conduct is precisely like that of Noah's, when he built the ark. It is said of Noah, that "being moved with fear, he prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7)." How did this act of his condemn the world? He was, it is true, "a preacher of righteousness;" but it was not so much his preaching, as his practice, which was here said to condemn the world.

His faith condemned their unbelief;  
his fear condemned their security;  
his obedience condemned their disobedience.

He needed not to say anything; his conduct spoke sufficiently; and the consciences of the beholders made the application.

Thus it is, in a measure, with every godly man; he is "an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men, [2 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.3)." The ungodly world may shut their eyes against the light of God's written Word; but they are forced to see the life of the godly man, whether they will or not; and in him they see what is the line of conduct which God requires, and how far they are from walking according to it.

That the world consider themselves as condemned by the godly, is evident, from the indignation which they manifest when the light of God's truth is made to shine before them. They instantly endeavor, by every possible means, to extinguish the light, or at all events to induce the godly to put their light under a bushel, and to hide it from their eyes. "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).

They will reprobate the opinions of the godly; but they would never concern themselves about the opinions of the godly, if they could but induce them to alter their conduct. It is their conduct that reproaches them, and that forms the real ground of their indignation against them. "If you were of the world," says our Lord, "the world (whatever your opinions might be) would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you! [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)."

Let piety enter into any family among us, and we shall see a fulfillment of that word, "Do you think that I came to send peace on earth? I came not to send peace, but a sword! [Matthew 10:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-36)."

2. By the open avowal of his opinions.

A faithful servant of God, in whatever line he moves, will not be ashamed of Christ, but will "confess him openly before men, [Matthew 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32)." This he feels to be a bounden duty. He does not wish to make a parade of his religion; but he is commanded to "let his light shine before men, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16);" and not only "not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but, when opportunity occurs, to reprove them, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11)." Hence, though he is cautious "not to cast pearls before swine, who would only trample them under their feet, [Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.6)," he is "ready to give to every inquirer a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear, [1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.15)." Nor will he be afraid to reprove sin, where he has any hope that his admonitions will be well received.

"We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition! [1 Thessalonians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.2)." Not fearing the face of man, but declaring, before all, and without reserve, "the whole counsel of God! [Acts 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.27)."

Though he moves in a private sphere, he will exert his influence, so far as it extends, for the suppression of evil, and for the diffusion of piety through the world. This indeed will raise up enemies against him; for men will "hate him who reproves in the gate, [Isaiah 29:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.21)." They hated our blessed Lord principally on this account; as he himself told them, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil!

[John 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.7)."

It was Micaiah's reproofs which incensed Ahab against him, "I hate Micaiah because he does not speak good concerning me, but trouble! [1 Kings 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.8). And it was the faithfulness of John, in reproving Herod's adultery with his brother Philip's wife, that brought down Herod's vengeance upon him, [Mark 6:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.25-27). But, notwithstanding all the odium that such fidelity will bring upon him, the true Christian will exercise it as occasion serves, declaring candidly his conviction, that "the broad road of the world leads to destruction, and that the narrow way alone will issue in eternal life! [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14)."

From this subject we may clearly **learn**,

1. How much guilt attaches to **us all**.

I will not now speak of those who have lived in open and flagrant sin; though, of course, all that I shall say will apply with double force to them. But I will speak of those who, though moral and discreet, have not given up themselves sincerely to God; or who grew up to maturity before they fully embraced the Gospel.

Look back to your early childhood; your example even at that time had an influence on your youthful companions; and said to them, in language which they clearly understood, that there was no occasion for them to seek after God.

As you grew up towards manhood, your influence became proportionably extended, and proportionably more injurious also. Go now to your different companions, and to the thousands who, unknown to you, derived from your example encouragement in sin; go, tell them how you regret the injuries you have done, and how anxious you are to repair the evil, by making known to them the way of life and salvation. Thousands, alas! are gone beyond the reach of any effort, and are already enduring in Hell the miseries which you contributed to heap upon them! But of those to whom you may gain access, how many, do you suppose, would listen to your advice? There would scarcely be found one among them all that would not laugh in your face, and account you either a fool or mad.

King Manasseh, by his influence and example, did evil to as great an extent as any man who ever lived; but when he exerted his royal influence to reclaim the people he had seduced to sin, he could not prevail; they would still, notwithstanding all his edicts, and all his example too, continue to "offer sacrifices on their high-places," instead of conforming themselves to the commandments of God, [2 Chronicles 33:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.15-17).

Thus, even supposing that we are now walking in the ways of God, the influence of our former lives will continue to operate to the ruin of many souls, and to the unspeakable augmentation of our own guilt! Contemplate this, I beg you, my brethren; and remember, that though you may never have committed one single sin that should expose you to shame before men, you are guilty in the sight of God, to an extent that no language can paint, and no imagination can conceive!

Nay, as strange as it may seem, the very blamelessness of your conduct before men, inasmuch as it has attracted a greater measure of their admiration, has unhappily contributed, even beyond the example of the generality, to deceive their minds, and to ruin their souls! I must then say to every one among you, that the injury which in your days of thoughtlessness you have unconsciously done to the souls of men—should be a ground of the deepest humiliation to you, to the last hour of your lives.

2. What a pre-eminent measure of guilt is contracted by **the backsliding professor**.

While others, by their ungodly lives, encourage sin in all around them—you do it with far greater effect! For you are understood as speaking from experience; while others deliver only, as it were, a hasty and ill-formed opinion. You are considered as proclaiming:  
that there is no excellency, no reality, in Christ;  
that the ways of the world, from which for a season you had departed, are not either so dangerous or so sinful as you had ignorantly supposed;  
that, in fact, there is no sincerity in those who profess godliness;  
and that, if all were as honest as you, they would, like you, throw off the religious mask at once!

Ah! think what a stumbling-block you lay in the way of others; how you "crucify the Son of God afresh;" and what cause multitudes will have to curse your very name forever, while they call for vengeance on your souls for contributing so largely to their eternal ruin!

And here let me speak to those who do not indeed draw back to open sin, but only so far as to conceal their principles in order to fit in with the world. You may account this prudence—but God will account it treason; and the Savior, whom "you thus refuse to confess, will refuse to acknowledge you in the presence of his Father! [Matthew 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32-33)." Consider this; and know assuredly on what terms your sentence shall be passed in the last day, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself, [2 Timothy 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12-13);" but will assuredly execute judgment, in perfect conformity to this rule.

3. What an incentive we have to cultivate piety in the highest possible degree.

The more our light shines before men, the more shall we put to shame the wickedness of the ungodly, and encourage the exercise of all that is good in the world. And who can tell how far our influence may extend? If we are the means of leading one sinner to repentance, "we save a soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins! [James 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.19-20)." And what may be the ultimate effects on that person's family, or even on his remotest posterity, who can tell? Let this then operate as an inducement with us to "shine as lights in the dark world! [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16)." The saving of our own souls may be our first motive; nevertheless, a strong additional motive we may find in the subject before us. Nor ought it to have light weight on our minds; for, while we benefit the world, we greatly honor our God; who is most glorified in those who most reflect his image, and most advance his kingdom in the world.

#815

THE SPIRITUAL LIGHT ENJOYED BY THE GODLY

**[Proverbs 28:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.5)**

"Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand all things."

There are, in the Holy Scriptures, broad, and, if I may so call them, sweeping expressions, which, if taken in their strict and literal sense, have not so much as even the semblance of truth. Yet they are not liable to be misunderstood, because every sincere reader will of necessity supply the restrictions which are necessary for a just interpretation of them. For instance: no one who read the words of the above verse, would suppose that Solomon ever intended to assert that all who sought the Lord were at once brought to the knowledge of all arts and sciences, and to an acquaintance with all the languages of the earth.

As we do with all Scripture, every expression must of necessity be restricted either by the subject of which it treats, or by the context in which it stands.

The words before us are used in a way of contrast with those which precede them. The writer has just said, that "Evil men do not understand justice;" that is, they do not understand what they are doing, or what they ought to do, or the true end and scope of God's dealings with them. But those who seek the Lord are well instructed in these things; they may be as ignorant of worldly things as any other people; but of things relating to their spiritual and eternal welfare they have a discernment which no ungodly man either does, or can, possess. Taking the word's with this restriction, I shall,

I. Confirm the sentiment.

Here I might enumerate a great variety of particulars, such as the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the glory of Christ, which a spiritual man alone can truly apprehend. But, as the expression is broad and comprehensive, so shall my illustration of it be; so that the contrast between the spiritual and carnal man may more forcibly appear. Of those, therefore, who seek the Lord, I will say:

1. The genuine Christian understands **the true state and character of the world** around them.

That everything bears the appearance of some great change that has been wrought upon it, is obvious to all. The very elements bear this stamp upon them; as does also the whole creation, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational. No one can conceive of the world, or anything in it, as having preserved that degree of perfection in which it was originally created. The ungodly therefore, as well as others, are sensible that there is a great deal of disorder in the world.

But the godly man alone sees this in any degree according to its real extent. He sees that the whole universe is up in arms against Almighty God, under the command of that wicked fiend, who, having himself rebelled against his Maker, is laboring to bring every creature into a participation of his crime; and who, having succeeded in this enterprise, is justly called, "the god of this world." He sees that this contest is carried on, not by those only who are sunk in open profligacy, but by the most moral and sober of mankind; who, in fact, are as much "alienated from God" as others, and have their own "minds as much at enmity with him" as any other people upon earth.

He sees, in a measure, what men ought to be, and what they are; and that all, without exception, are "living unto themselves, and not unto their God." The different orders of men are, in his eyes, only like different parts of one great army; differently dressed indeed, and differently employed; some under the very garb of friends, while others are arrayed as open and determined foes; but all are acting, in their respective places, for the establishment of Satan's kingdom, rather than of Christ's.

This, I say, the godly man sees, in perfect correspondence with what Paul has declared, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understands; there is none that seeks after God; they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one! [Romans 3:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-12)."

2. The genuine Christian understands **the real happiness of man**.

The world at large conceive of this as consisting in temporal enjoyment. Pleasure, riches, and honor are looked upon as the great sources from whence happiness must flow; and where these are not eagerly coveted, there is something of a temporal nature substituted in their place; some fond conceit, or a mere state of carnal ease, devoid either of any strong emotions, whether of pain or pleasure.

But the godly man knows that there is no genuine happiness but in God:  
in a sense of his acceptance by God,  
in a performance of his will,  
in a prospect of his glory.

There is in his views, and those of an ungodly man, a most perfect contrast with respect to this matter; each coveting what the other despises, and each regarding as contemptible what the other desires. Our blessed Lord's words will put this matter in the clearest light. See [Luke 6:20-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.20-26).

The rich, the mirthful, the honored—are by the ungodly regarded with admiration and envy; by the godly, these things are regarded with pity and compassion.

The poor weeping and persecuted saint, on the contrary, is by the ungodly despised; while the godly desires the experience of such a one with the fondest delight.

In a word, while to the inquiry, "Who will show us any good?" the ungodly man says, 'Give me a supply of food, and wine, and oil;' the godly man pours out his soul in that petition of the Psalmist, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon me! [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)."

3. The genuine Christian understands the proper tendency of all that God is doing in the world.

God is seen both in his Word and works; and both in the one and in the other he appears to an ungodly world—to obstruct, rather than to advance, the happiness of his creatures. The Word is too strict in its requirements to suit our fallen state; and the dispensations of his Providence are calculated only to embitter life by continual troubles or bereavements.

Far different from these, however, are the opinions of a godly man. The whole inspired volume, whether it promises or threatens, prohibits or enjoins, is in the godly man's eyes a fountain of good, springing up to everlasting life! And all the diversified afflictions which arise, are regarded by him as blessings in disguise; as messengers sent to "humble us, and to do us good at our latter end," by weaning us from things visible and temporal, and stimulating us to lay hold on those which are invisible and eternal!

As an ignorant novice may dread a cross-wind, as calculated only to retard the vessel in which he is embarked—the experienced mariner will welcome it, as filling all his sails better than a wind that is the most direct. In the same way, while the ungodly man sees afflictions only as calamities which he would most avoid—the godly man welcomes them from God's hands, in the assured hope that "his light and momentary afflictions will 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)."

Thus, to go no further, it sufficiently appears how much clearer insight the godly man has into God's Word and works, than the ungodly man can pretend to. And now let us,

II. Account for this fact.

I readily concede, that, in point of natural talent or acquired learning—the godly man may be inferior to others. But in spiritual discernment—he is superior to the wisest philosopher on earth. Does anyone inquire how this should be! I answer:

1. The genuine Christian has God himself for his teacher.

All God's people "are taught by him;" and it is in consequence of their "having heard and learned from the Father," that they attain to a knowledge which no other person can possess, [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45). Were I to say that "the Spirit of God opens the eyes of their understanding," and "brings them out of darkness into marvelous light," I would say enough to justify all the assertions which I have made; nor would anyone have a right to ask from me an explanation of the process by which this mysterious work is accomplished.

Yet I think that the mode of divine teaching may be in some little measure comprehended by means of a suitable and familiar illustration. There are different ways in which an object which is obscure may be rendered visible:  
one way is, by bringing it nearer to us;  
another is, by removing intervening obstacles;  
another, by shining stronger light upon it;  
and another, by strengthening the organs of vision to behold it.

In the same way, without entering into a minute consideration of all these particulars, we may observe, in general, that God's methods of instructing us by his Spirit are somewhat analogous to these; in that he brings home with power to our souls the truths which we hear, and inclines our hearts to embrace them. The telescope, which brings distant objects to our view, and the microscope, which enables us to discern things which are too small to be seen by the naked eye—make no difference whatever either in the objects themselves or in the organs whereby we perceive them. The things themselves, and our faculties also, all remain the same, whether the instruments are used by us or not. In the same way, there is no difference in the truths which are heard by different people, or in the capacity of those by whom they are perceived; the difference is in the manner in which the truths are presented to the mind; and if we, by instruments of human contrivance, are able thus to bring to the sight of men things that are invisible to the naked eye—then we may well suppose that God is able to bring home to the souls of men truths which the unassisted mind is unable to apprehend.

But I think we may get a juster view of this, by considering how it is that the imperfections of our sight are remedied in common life. When we have an indistinct vision of objects before us, it is for the most part owing to this; through an excess or defect of convexity in our eye, the object before us either falls short of the retina, or goes beyond it; and the use of glasses is, by a suitable medium to bring the object on the retina, so that it may be distinctly impressed thereon, in all its just symmetry and proportions.

In the same way, the Spirit of God, by giving to us "an honest and a good heart," imprints upon the tablet of our souls the truths, of which, without his aid, we could have no just perception; and thus we are enabled to understand what others are not able to discern. And thus is fulfilled what John has said, "The spiritual man judges all things; yet he himself is judged of no man; for who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ," and therefore are qualified to judge both ourselves and others! [1 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.15-16).

Now, I the rather dwell on this, in order to remove from the minds of objectors the idea that we lay claim to anything like miraculous inspiration. We do indeed say, that God alone can enable us to discern the things of the Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.12); but we say, also, that he does this through the use of our own faculties, under the direction and influence of his Spirit; and thus "he reveals to babes and sucklings the things which he has hidden from the wise and prudent! [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)."

2. The genuine Christian has an inward experience of the things which he knows.

The apostle John affirms this very thing, "He who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10);" that is, he has in his soul a distinct perception of those truths which he has received through the medium of his understanding. And this also, I think, may, through a familiar illustration, be made perfectly intelligible to our minds.

We know that our senses are given us for the purpose of discerning the distinctive excellencies of everything around us. It is not sufficient that one faculty alone be brought to bear upon the object that is set before us; we must exercise upon everything that very faculty which is pre-eminently formed to discover and appreciate its excellence.

Suppose we see, for instance:  
the sun, without feeling its beams;  
or a flower, without having our smell regaled by its fragrances;  
or honey, without tasting its sweetness;  
or a singing bird, without hearing his melodious notes.

It is obvious that we can form but a very inadequate notion of these things, for lack of an acquaintance with their chief excellencies. In like manner, we cannot judge of a diamond by the touch, when its brilliancy has never been submitted to our sight. It is through the apprehending of everything by its appropriate sense, that we attain just and adequate perceptions of it.

In the same way, the Apostle tells us, that the godly man "has all his senses exercised to discern good and evil, [Hebrews 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.14);" and hence it is, that having within himself a perception of them which no other man can enjoy, he possesses also an evidence which no other man can attain.

Now this test may be applied to everything that is of a spiritual nature; and the perception arising from it is fitly called "a spiritual discernment, 1 Corinthians 2:14." And by this, I say again, "we understand all things;" as John also has told us, "You have an anointing of 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)."

Here is contained all that I have spoken; namely, the extent of the knowledge possessed by God's people, and the means by which they are enabled to attain it: "We know all things," because God himself is our teacher; and by the unction poured out, that is, by the "eye-salve which he puts upon our eyes," he gives us the actual perception of everything in our own souls, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18), and, consequently, the clear and proper understanding of it.

Methinks you are now ready to **inquire**,

1. How shall I attain this spiritual understanding?

I answer: Not by mere study, even of the Scriptures themselves; but rather by "seeking after God" in spirit and in truth. This is the particular point suggested in my text, "Those who seek the Lord understand all things." You will remember what our Lord has said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17)." This is that which I have spoken of before; it supposes that there is in us that "honest and good heart," which alone receives the Word aright, and alone enables us to "bring forth fruit with patience, [Luke 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.15)."

I would not depreciate books of human composition, and still less the Scriptures of truth; but we must never forget, that "though Paul should plant, and Apollos water—but it is God alone who can give the increase! 1 Corinthians 3:5-7." In fact, this is the reason why many hear the Gospel for years without any saving benefit to their souls; they will not humble themselves before God, and seek for mercy through Christ, and give themselves up unreservedly to God; and therefore they remain forever without any true understanding of the word, and any sweet experience of its power. You must first be melted by it; and then you will be "poured into its mold," and attain, by means of it, that knowledge of God which is life eternal!

2. How shall I manifest my spiritual understanding to the world?

If "God have given you an understanding to know him, [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20)," then show it, not by a fond conceit of your own attainments, or a contemptuous spurning of others as blind and carnal; but by a holy life and conduct, such as none but those who are taught of God can maintain. If you know more than others, you should be prepared to answer that question, "What do you do more than others? [Matthew 5:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.47)."

"The tree must be known by its fruit;" and, if you have received a superior illumination in your mind, you must "walk worthy of that high distinction," and "shine as lights in a dark world." If the Lord, by his Spirit, have written his Word upon your hearts—then must you show forth that Word in your lives, and be in the world as "epistles of Christ, known and rend of all men! [2 Corinthians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.2)."

#816

ADVANTAGES OF THE RICH AND OF THE POOR COMPARED

**[Proverbs 28:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.11)**

"The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that has understanding searches him out." KJV

"A rich man may be wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has discernment sees through him." NIV

Proverbs are, for the most part, very obscure; they are intended to convey an abundance of instruction in a small space; and the truths contained in them are almost always such as escape the observation of unthinking men, and such as militate against their most received opinions.

That the rich have greatly the advantage of the poor in reference to knowledge in general, must be confessed; for they have leisure time, which the poor cannot command; and instruction, which the poor cannot obtain.

Hence it is generally supposed that the rich have the same advantage in reference to divine knowledge. But this is by no means true. On the contrary, the poor have, in reference to divine knowledge, the advantage over them. And this is what Solomon affirms, in the words before us, "The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that has understanding searches him out."

In support of Solomon's assertion, I will show,

I. That the poor have really the advantage of the rich in reference to divine knowledge.

Elihu, intending to incriminate Job, observed, "Great men are not always wise, [Job 32:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 32.9)." And if this is true in relation to the affairs of this world, much more is it so in reference to the concerns of eternity Nor indeed are the poor always wise in this respect; yet have they, on the whole, the advantage of the rich.

1. They had the advantage in the **days of old**.

Look at those who received the testimony of our blessed Lord. It was said with a kind of triumph, "Have any of the rulers and of the Pharisees believed on him? [John 7:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.48)." Whereas we are told, on the other hand, that "the common people heard him gladly, [Mark 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.37)."

And such was also the experience of the Apostles; it was chiefly among the poor that their ministry was attended with success; as Paul observes, "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him! [1 Corinthians 1:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-29)."

2. They have also the advantage **at this day**.

It was to be one mark of the Messiah's advent, that "to the poor the Gospel should be preached, [Matthew 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.5)." By them, too, was the Gospel to be received, while by the rich it should be rejected and despised. Nor did our blessed Lord merely affirm this, but he accounted it a fit subject of praise and thanksgiving, "I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes! [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26)."

And now look around, and see if it is not thus at this day. Who are they that value the Gospel? Who are they that attend it, wherever it is preached with effect? Some, indeed, there are of the wise and rich; but very few in comparison; so few, that if a man of wealth and learning show a decided love to the Gospel, he is regarded almost as a phenomenon; and that, too, no less by the Church than by the world itself.

The great mass of religious people are of the poorer class; so that at this day, no less than in the apostolic age, when that appeal of the Apostle James is made to us, "Hearken, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him, [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)," there is but one answer that can be given to it; we must say: It is even so; it is from among the poor, and not from among the rich, that God has formed his Church; it is "of unhewn stones that his altar is made, [Exodus 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.25);" and "of these very stones that he has raised up children to Abraham, [Matthew 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.9)."

Seeing, then, that what we have asserted is an unquestionable fact, let us,

II. Account for it.

We might be satisfied with referring it, as our blessed Lord does, to the sovereign will of God, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight, [Matthew 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.26)," should be quite sufficient for us. But we may trace the fact to natural causes.

The rich, from the very circumstance of their elevation in society, are under considerable disadvantages, beyond what are experienced by the poor:

1. The rich are more **blinded by prejudice** (preconceived opinions).

Into the minds of the higher orders of society prejudices are instilled from their earliest infancy. Religious people are kept at a distance from them; religious books are taken out of their hands; and religious opinions are branded with every epithet that can render them odious. For one word that would lead them to God, a hundred are spoken to draw them away from him. Let them betray a love to earthly trifles, and no one will offer a sentiment to turn them from such an evil way; but let them betray a decided love to heavenly things, and multitudes will exert themselves in every possible way to divert them from so dangerous a path. Hence their prejudices are all on the side of evil and of the world.

And how great the effect of prejudice is, may be seen in the adherents both of Judaism and Popery. One would imagine that the superstitions both of the one and of the other must give way before the light of the New Testament; but prejudice, as has been said, has neither eyes nor ears. *Truth* has no force, and *argument* has no power, when set before one whose mind is filled with preconceived opinions. The Apostle says of the Jews, that "to this day a veil is upon their hearts; so that, when Moses is read to them, they cannot see the true scope of his instructions, [2 Corinthians 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.14-15)."

And precisely thus it is also with the rich, when the Gospel is preached to them, "Their eyes are blinded; and they cannot discern" the truth of those things which are proposed to their consideration, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4).

But the poor are, comparatively, but little subjected to this influence. People take not so much pains to prejudice the minds of the poor; and they are left more to think and act for themselves. Hence, when truth is proposed to them, they are more open to conviction, and more easily brought under its power. And this is one reason why even the "publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom before the Scribes and Pharisees!"

2. The rich are more **enslaved by cultural customs and etiquette**.

The rich, amidst all their boasted liberty, are the truest slaves that the world contains. If negroes are afraid of the scourge of their masters, so are the rich afraid lest they should be subjected to the lash of censure among their equals. Let an opportunity of spiritual instruction be afforded to them, they would be afraid to avail themselves of it, if it were offered at a place not frequented by the rich, or by a person not approved among them. Even though in their hearts they would be glad to hear the instruction, they dare not go over the line prescribed by custom and fashion, lest they should bring upon themselves some reproach. They would be ashamed to be found reading the Bible; and would be in perfect horrors if they were discovered weeping for their sins. True, a rich Papist would not blush at being known to follow the superstitious usages of his Church, because other rich people both approve and follow the same superstitions; but a rich Protestant would not dare to spend a day in fasting and prayer, because the rich of his own community pour contempt on piety, and on the means by which piety is advanced in the soul.

But the poor are more free to follow the dictates of their conscience; and when they "have a spiritual understanding," they will follow them; they will not be content to "continue in the broad road, because of the many who walk there; or to desert the narrow path, because there be but few who find it, [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14);" they are more independent of the opinions of the world; and are prepared to say with Joshua, "Let others think or act as they please, I will serve the Lord! [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15)."

3. The rich are more **deluded by pride**.

The rich, on account of their wealth and influence, have great deference paid to their opinions. The flattery which they receive is extremely pleasing to them; and they soon begin to think that they are indeed as wise as their fawning sycophants represent them to be. Hence they become very confident in their own opinions, and cannot bear contradiction upon any subject. They suppose, too, that they are as competent to judge of religion as of any other subject; and will lay down the law upon the subject of divine truth as confidently as if they had the wisdom of Daniel or Paul.

But the poor man, who has been taught of God, sees at once how ignorant these people are on those subjects on which they presume to dogmatize with such unblushing confidence. The proud rich man will tell us how erroneous it is to represent our fallen nature as so depraved; and what a licentious doctrine that of salvation by faith alone is; and that a life of entire devotedness to God is no better than wild fanaticism or puritanic hypocrisy.

But "the poor man, that has understanding, searches him out;" he has within himself the evidence of those truths which the conceited man decries. John says, "He who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10);" and this internal evidence is more to him than all the assertions which conceit can dictate or arrogance maintain.

He knows his own depravity;  
he feels his need of the Savior;  
he tastes the sweetness of true religion;  
and from God he inherits a blessing, [Matthew 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3).

While the rich despiser of his faith receives nothing but woes at the hand of his offended God! [Isaiah 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.21).

Improvement.

1. Do not envy those who are rich in this world.

Truly they are encompassed with snares, and exposed to great dangers.

The advantages which they possess are very trivial; (what necessities has the richest man beyond food and clothing, which the poor possess as well as they?)

But their disadvantages are very great; so great, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Remarkable, in this view, is that advice of Solomon, "Labor not to be rich; cease from your own wisdom, [Proverbs 23:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.4)." The errors here pointed at are almost inseparable from each other; and every one who is truly wise will be on his guard against them both.

2. Seek to be "rich towards God!"

That is true wisdom; and the more you possess of spiritual riches, the more truly humble you will be before God. Indeed, a poor pious man is, in God's estimation, as high a character as exists on earth! When God's only-begotten Son became incarnate, this was the character he assumed. Seek to be conformed to him, and you need not desire anything beyond. Nothing is of any value without piety; nor can anything add to piety, when it fully occupies the soul! [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8).

#817

TRUE REPENTANCE RECOMMENDED

**[Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)**

"He who covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy!"

The subject of repentance offers nothing for the gratification of "itching ears." But it must not on that account be overlooked; since, if less interesting than some other subjects on the score of novelty, it yields to none in point of importance.

Repentance is the first act whereby a sinner returns unto his God; and it is an act for which the most eminent saint has occasion from day to day; insomuch that in him it assumes rather the character of a habit than an act. In the more grown Christian, it is the warp, while every other grace is the woof; whether the colors interwoven with it is grave or mirthful, this pervades the whole piece, and is, as it were, the foundation of all the rest!

For the advancing of this work in all our souls, I will show,

I. The folly of covering our sins.

To conceal our sins from the all-seeing eye of God is impossible!

Yet there are various ways in which men attempt to cover their sins.

Sin, though it cannot be hidden from God, may be covered from ourselves:  
by denial,  
by excuses,  
by forgetfulness.

Sin may be covered by denial.

Many, though walking in the habitual violation of the plainest duties, will deny that they commit any sin at all. As "the adulterous woman," of whom Solomon speaks, "eats, and wipes her mouth, and says, I have done no wickedness! [Proverbs 30:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.20);" so these, in gratifying their sensual appetites, think that they commit no more evil than if they had merely satisfied the demands of hunger and thirst; and, in their minds, one sinful indulgence is but a prelude to another, whenever opportunity and inclination concur to call for it.

People of this description, if they receive only a distant intimation of their state, are ready to reply, even against God himself, just as Cain did, after murdering his brother Abel, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I know not; am I my brother's keeper! [Genesis 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.9)."

Thus, rather than they humble themselves before God, they will deny their accountability to him, saying, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us? [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)." But this denial of their guilt will avail them nothing. God will reprove them as he did Israel of old, [Jeremiah 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.23-24). This is a fine image to illustrate the insatiable avidity with which the wicked follow their own lusts and passions; and will surely visit them with his heaviest indignation! [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31); [Jeremiah 2:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.35).

Sin may be covered by excuses.

Others cover their sins by endeavoring to mitigate the guilt of them.

Thus did Adam and Eve in Paradise.

Thus also did Saul, after sparing the king of the Amalekites, and the spoil which he had taken, instead of destroying them utterly according to the direction which he had received from the Lord. He first of all asserted that he had executed the divine command; and that being disproved by the lowing of the oxen, he vindicated himself, asserting, that, in as far as he was implicated in the affair, he had acted under the influence of the people, whom he could not restrain, and dared not to resist! [1 Samuel 15:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.13-15); [1 Samuel 15:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.20-21); 1 Samuel 15:24.

Thus it is also that the generality are acting all around us. They cannot actually deny that what they are doing is contrary to God's revealed will, but they are quick to offer excuses:

they are so circumstanced, that they cannot on the whole act otherwise than they do;

the current of the world is so strong against them, that they cannot resist it;

and, if they err, the fault is rather in those who have led the way, than in themselves, who have only gone with the stream.

Sin may be covered by forgetfulness.

But perhaps the most common way of covering sing is by letting them pass altogether unnoticed. Many are not altogether satisfied that their ways are right; but they go on without much thought, and presently forget anything which may have made a slight impression on their minds. Forgetting their sins, they suppose that God has forgotten them also. Of such people God complains, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness! [Hosea 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.2)." Very beautiful is the description which God gives of such people, by the Prophet Jeremiah, "I hearkened and heard, but they spoke not aright; no man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rushes into the battle, [Jeremiah 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.6)." The horse is unconscious of his danger; and so are the mass of ungodly men, "it is a sport to them to commit iniquity;" and, provided it is not of such a heinous nature as to violate the usages of the place wherein they live, they say, "No evil will come unto us! [Jeremiah 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.12)."

But all who thus attempt to cover their sins are guilty of the extreme folly.

They "can never prosper." They may have temporal prosperity as much as others; but in their souls they cannot prosper, [Job 31:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.33).

They cannot prosper in this world.

They can have no peace with God or in their own consciences; for God has said, "There is no peace to the wicked!"

They can have no victory over sin; for God will not interpose to deliver them from bonds, which they themselves are pleased with.

They can have no delight in holy ordinances, either in the public assembly, or in their secret chamber. They may, like Ezekiel's hearers, be pleased with hearing a man that can play well upon an instrument, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32); but they can have no fellowship with God; for "what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness, or light with darkness? [2 Corinthians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14)."

They can have no bright and cheering prospects of the eternal world; for they have no evidence within themselves of their acceptance with God, nor any "fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light."

Much less can they prosper in the world to come.

There the impenitent and unbelieving will meet their deserved recompense. No joy awaits them there.

They did not seek heavenly glory, and therefore they shall not find it!

They came not weary and heavy laden unto Christ; and therefore they have no part in the rest which he alone can give.

They did not humble themselves before God; and therefore they can never be exalted by God.

Let us now contemplate, on the other hand,

II. The benefit of true repentance.

True repentance consists of two parts:

1. A **confessing** of our sins.

Confession is of absolute and indispensable necessity. We never ca humble ourselves aright without it. Nor ought we to rest in mere general acknowledgments; we should search out our sins; we should say, "Thus and thus I have done!" We should go farther, and enter into the particular aggravations of our sins, in order the more deeply to affect our own hearts, and to fill our minds with self-loathing and self-abhorrence.

Not that God needs to be informed; he knows all our iniquities, and all the circumstances with which they have been attended. But by spreading them all before God, we give the more glory to him as a God of infinite mercy and compassion; at the same time that we prepare our own minds for a due reception of mercy at his hands.

2. A **forsaking** of our sins.

If we hold them fast, it is a clear proof that our repentance is not genuine. Nor must we forsake them merely as a man parts with a limb, which, if not amputated, would destroy his life. We may indeed take into our consideration the danger arising from them, as our Lord tells us in the case of "a right hand or right eye," which, if retained, would plunge us into everlasting perdition! But we must regard them as odious, and hateful, and abominable; and long for deliverance from them as we would for deliverance from the most loathsome disorder.

These two, a confessing, and forsaking of sin, must go together. Supposing we could put away our sins for the future, it would still befit us to bewail those which are past; and, if we bewail them ever so bitterly, still must we not rest without gaining the victory over them, it is the union of them both that marks true penitence.

Where such repentance is—there God will bestow his richest blessings.

It is said in a subsequent part of this chapter, that "a faithful man shall be blessed." And this is true of all who deal faithfully with their own souls and with their God, in bewailing and mortifying their most secret corruptions. This is strongly asserted by all the inspired writers. "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! [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7)." To such both the faithfulness and the justice of God assure a perfect remission of all sin! [1 John 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9-10). Nor will God delay to manifest his love, when once he sees our souls truly humbled for sin. The self-condemning publican was justified even before he left the spot where his confessions were made, [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.14).

David speaks of the same truth as realized also in his experience. While he forbore to humble himself, he was kept in a state of darkness and misery; but "as soon as he began to confess his sins unto the Lord, the Lord forgave the iniquity of his sin, [Psalm 32:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.3-5)."

And need we say what "mercy" God will grant to penitents in the last day? Surely all the manifestations of his love which he gives to them in this world, are but as a twinkling star compared with that full splendor of the Sun of Righteousness, which in that day every contrite soul shall enjoy. The joy of the Father over the returning prodigal, with all the music, and feasting, and dancing—are but faint images of what shall be realized in Heaven over every true penitent through all eternity!

From hence we may **learn**,

1. Why it is that men know so little of spiritual prosperity.

Repentance is a work to which we are very averse! If we did but occasionally set apart a day for solemn fasting and prayer, and set ourselves more diligently to the great duty of humiliation before God—we would have more delightful visits from him, and richer communications of his grace to our souls.

2. How painful will be the self-condemnation of all who perish!

The promise in our text will then be remembered with unutterable shame and sorrow. What a reflection will it be: "I might have obtained mercy, but would not seek it;" God said to me, "Only acknowledge your iniquity, [Jeremiah 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.12-13);" but I would not deign to acknowledge it. Truly, the easy terms on which salvation might have been obtained, will form the bitterest ingredient of that bitter cup which the impenitent soul will have to drink to all eternity!

3. What obligations we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ!

It is through him, and through him alone, that repentance is of any avail. There is nothing in repentance that can merit forgiveness; all the merit is in Christ Jesus—even in his obedience unto death; it is that which cancels all our guilt; it is that which purchases our title to the heavenly inheritance. While therefore we confess and forsake our sins, let our eyes be directed to Him as our only hope, even to him, "in whom all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and in whom they shall glory."

#818

THE PORTION OF THE FAITHFUL MAN

**[Proverbs 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.20)**

"A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." KJV

"A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished." NIV

The apostle Paul has told us that "the love of money is the root of all evil; and that many, while coveting after it, have pierced themselves through with many sorrows! [1 Timothy 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.10)." In truth, the effects of this principle on the people in whom it dwells, and on all connected with them, are beyond all conception bitter and injurious. On the other hand, an indifference to the love of money greatly elevates and ennobles those in whom it is found; and conduces, in a very eminent degree, to their happiness both in this world and the next.

This appears to be the precise import of our text, as it stands connected with the words which follow it. But we need not so limit its use. It contains a general truth, which will afford us much profitable instruction. Taking it in this more enlarged sense, I will endeavor to show,

I. Who are they that answer the description here given us.

Nehemiah, speaking of his brother Hanani, says, "He was a faithful man, and feared God above many;" and he assigns this as his reason for appointing him to superintend the repairs of the city of Jerusalem; since he might be fully depended on for a conscientious discharge of his high office, [Nehemiah 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 7.2). From hence, then, we see who they are that are entitled to the character of "faithful men."

1. The godly are faithful to their convictions in things relating to **God**.

There is in every man, under the Christian dispensation, a conviction that he is a sinner who stands in need of mercy; that God has revealed to us in his Gospel the way in which alone he will dispense mercy; and that, as responsible beings, who shall soon stand at the judgment-seat of Christ in order to be judged according to our works, it is our duty and our happiness to be seeking for saving mercy in God's appointed way.

Now, if a man is faithful to his convictions respecting these things, we may justly call him a faithful man; but, if he neglects God, and pours contempt upon the Lord Jesus, and disregards his eternal interests, and labors in every possible way to silence the remonstrances of his own conscience—is he faithful? No indeed! He is a traitor to God and to his own soul. If he is truly upright before God, he will give to the concerns of his soul and of eternity the attention they demand.

2. The godly are faithful to their engagements in things relating to **man**.

Without supposing any express compact voluntarily entered into between man and man, there is of necessity a mutual obligation lying upon every man to perform the duties of his place and station. As husbands or wives, parents or children, masters or servants, magistrates or subjects—all of us have some line of conduct prescribed to us; and, as members of one great body, are bound to perform our proper office for the benefit of the whole. Every person feels this in relation to others; and would account himself very injuriously treated, if any should violate towards him the duties of their station; and, consequently, every one must owe to others the treatment which he himself claims at their hands.

Now, a faithful man considers this, and will labor to do unto others as he, in a change of circumstances, would think it right that they should do unto him. But if a man consults nothing but his own interests and inclinations, and makes his own will the only rule of his conduct, can he be called "faithful?" Is he not as much bound to observe the commandments of the second table as those of the first? His obligation to both the one and the other of them is unalterable; nor can either the one or the other in any wise be dispensed with. Piety towards God, and morality towards man, must go hand in hand. Neither of them can supersede the other; nor can either of them exist without the other; and he who is faithful in one, must of necessity be faithful in both.

For the encouragement of such characters, I will proceed to state,

II. What are the peculiar blessings reserved for the faithful.

Truly "the faithful man shall abound with blessings!"

I might here enumerate thousands of blessings, if time would admit of it; but I will specify only three:  
the approbation of God;  
the testimony of a good conscience;  
and a blessed hope of immortality and glory!

But how shall I describe these blessings?

1. The approbation of God: "In God's favor is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself, [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5); [Psalm 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3)."

2. As for the testimony of our own conscience, and the witness of God's Spirit with ours, that we are upright before him, man can have no greater joy on earth than that! [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12), [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16).

3. And who can adequately declare the blessedness of a soul that apprehends God himself as his portion, and all the glory of Heaven as his inheritance!

But it is the peculiarity and exclusiveness of this portion which we are chiefly called to notice.

To the faithful man these blessings are given; but to him also are they limited; for they are peculiar to him, "and a stranger intermeddles not with his joy, [Proverbs 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.10)." Let the man who is unfaithful to his convictions or to his engagements say what he knows of these blessings? If he speaks the truth before God, he has no experience of them whatever in his own soul. Indeed, it is impossible that he should have any sense of them as already imparted to him; since, if God is true, no one of them belongs to him, "he has no part or lot in anyone of them;" they belong to the faithful man—and to him alone!

Application:

1. What is the proper scope and tendency of the Gospel.

It is surely intended to effect a change, yes, an exceeding great change, both in the characters and states of men.

But what does it effect in their character? Does it make them hypocrites? No; but faithful both to God and man.

And what does it effect in their states? Does it deprive them of comforts, and make them melancholy? No; but it makes them to abound with blessings, both in time and in eternity.

O that you could be prevailed upon to view the Gospel in its true light, and to embrace it with your whole hearts!

2. What bitter self-condemnation awaits the impenitent and unbelieving man.

You have now the blessings of time and sense. But what are they, in comparison with those that await the faithful man? Even here your portion is far inferior to his; but what will they be in the eternal world? Truly, you will all find, before long, that to gain the whole world with the loss of your own souls is a sad exchange! May God make you wise in time, that you may not have to deplore your folly to all eternity!

#819

SELF-CONFIDENCE REPROVED

**[Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26)**

"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool,  
 but whoever walks wisely shall be delivered."

The Holy Scriptures speak plainly, and without reserve; they know nothing of that squeamish delicacy that keeps men from designating things by their appropriate names. They declare sin to be sin, and folly to be folly, without considering what the pride of man will say to the fidelity that is expressed.

Now this gives an exceeding great advantage to ministers; for though it does not sanction rudeness, or indelicacy, or inattention to the feelings of mankind—it does authorize a "great plainness of speech" in all who deliver the messages of God to a sinful and self-deceiving world. Indeed, by universal consent, a greater freedom of speech is admitted, even by the most fastidious in our public addresses, than would be palatable in private converse; nor will any be offended with us, if we declare authoritatively, and without any palliating modifications, what God has said, and what we know to be true, and what therefore we must affirm—that "he who trusts in his own heart is a fool."

In confirmation of this plain and solemn truth, I will show,

I. What is **the conduct** here reprobated—trusting in our own heart.

Man, when he fell from God, renounced not only his allegiance to him as his Maker, but his trust in him as his God. Since that time, man desires to be a god unto himself, and places his reliance rather on his own inherent powers, than on the Majesty of Heaven.

1. Fallen man relies on his own wisdom and understanding.

This is true, especially in reference to all that concerns the soul. Every person conceives that he knows what saving religion is, and how he is to obtain favor at the hands of God. The most careless of men stand, in this respect, on a footing with the most thoughtful and serious; every one is alike confident that his opinions are just; and he holds them last, with a degree of assurance which the most studious habits would scarcely warrant.

Some, however, will admit the Scriptures to be the only true standard of religious sentiment; but then they suppose themselves to be perfectly equal to the task of extracting from them the mind of God. Unconverted men feel no need of divine teaching. They are not conscious of the blindness of their minds, and of the bias that is upon their hearts on the side of error. Hence they will take some few particular passages which favor the prejudices they have imbibed; and on them they will build, as securely as if it was impossible for them to err!

2. Fallen man relies on his own purposes and resolutions.

Every man has, at some time or other, thought with himself, that it was desirable for him to be prepared for death and judgment; and most people have formed some faint purposes at least, if not a fixed resolution, that they will amend their lives at some point in time, and prepare for their great account. In some imminent danger, or under some distressing occurrence, the purpose may have been formed with a view to a speedy change; but, in general, the convenient season is looked for at somewhat of a distant period.

But the power to turn to God is doubted by none. The sufficiency of man to execute his own purposes and resolutions is never questioned. Every one supposes that he shall be able to effect whatever his judgment shall direct, and his necessities require. As for any need of divine assistance for these things, men have no idea of it. Their own strength is equal to the performance of all that they judge necessary for their salvation; and therefore they may safely defer the great work of their souls to any period which it may suit them to assign.

That I may dissuade you from such vain confidence, I proceed to state,

II. **The folly** of trusting in our own heart.

Even in relation to earthly things a proud confidence in our own judgment and strength is a mark of folly; but in reference to the concerns of the soul it is folly in the extreme. For,

1. Trusting in ourselves robs us of the benefit we might receive from trusting in God.

This is particularly intimated in the words immediately connected with my text, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool; but whoever walks wisely shall be delivered." Now here the "walking wisely" is put for trusting in God, rather than in ourselves; and the person who so conducts himself, "shall be delivered" from those evils into which the self-confident must fall.

Indeed the very honor of God is concerned to leave us, that we may reap the bitter fruits of our own folly. If we succeeded in effecting our own deliverance, we would become proud and ascribe all the glory to ourselves. But God has warned us, that, if we provoke him thus to jealousy, we shall lose the benefits which, by trusting in him, we might have obtained; and bring on ourselves the very evils which, by trusting in him, we might have escaped, "This is what the LORD says:

"Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD (to trust in ourselves is a departure of heart from God). He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

"But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit!" [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-8)."

2. Trusting in ourselves ensures beyond all doubt, our ultimate disappointment.

If ever any man was authorized to trust in himself, methinks Peter and the other Apostles were, in relation to their desertion of their Lord, in his lowest extremity. In the fullness of his own sufficiency, Peter said, "Though I die with you, I will not deny you. And so likewise said they all." Yet, behold, no sooner was their Master apprehended, than "they all forsook him and fled!" And Peter, the most sell-confident of them all, denied him with oaths and curses.

Thus will it be with all of us; however firm our resolutions are, they will prove only as wax before the fire, if they be made in our own strength. We need, indeed, only look back and see what has become of the resolutions we have already made, that:  
"we would turn from this or that sin;  
we would mortify this or that propensity;  
we would give up ourselves to God in newness of life."

Alas! alas! how have these purposes vanished, as smoke before the whirlwind! And though we may think to profit by experience, and to become more steadfast in consequence of our former disappointments, we shall only live to prove with still greater evidence, the folly of our own ways, and the truth of that inspired declaration, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! Who can know it?"

3. Trusting in ourselves will keep us from discovering our error, until it is past a remedy.

Tell people what God says of their ways, and they will not believe it. Every one thinks himself safe; and holds fast his persuasion, in spite of all the admonitions that can be given him. The Rich Man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, would have deemed anyone very uncharitable who would have warned him of his approaching end. He would have found an abundance to allege in his own defense; and would not have believed that so inoffensive a life as his could ever issue in such misery as was denounced against him! His five brethren, who succeeded to his wealth, and followed him in what they esteemed so befitting their situation in life, were equally secure in their own minds, and equally averse to think themselves liable to God's displeasure; nay, so averse were they to admit such an idea, that, if their deceased brother's wish had been granted, and one had been sent from the dead to warn them of their danger, they would not have believed his report. Hence, like him who had gone before them, they held fast their delusions, until, one after another, they all came into the same place of torment! Each, at the instant of his own departure, saw the danger of those who were left behind; for, as they would not believe Moses and the Prophets, their ruin was inevitable, and their misery sure.

Precisely such is our state and conduct. We will trust in our own hearts, and deny the necessity for trusting in the Lord alone for salvation; and the probability is, that we shall never be undeceived, until we come to experience what now we will not believe. And are not they who pursue such a course justly denominated fools? If a man would not be persuaded that the leaping down from a lofty precipice would hurt him, and would desperately put it to the trial, and break all his bones—would anyone be at a loss to assign an appropriate name to him? Yet would he be wise, in comparison with one who, in defiance of all the warnings of Holy Writ, will trust in himself rather than in God!

See, then, from hence:

1. How **desirable** is Scriptural **knowledge of one's self**.

Respecting gross offences, men cannot be ignorant of their condition before God; but respecting the state and habit of their minds, especially in relation to the object of their trust and confidence—they are almost as ignorant as new-born babes. People will not inquire; they will not examine; they will not even suspect that they may be wrong. In truth, they will not believe that their self-confidence is so criminal as the Scriptures represent it, or that any danger can await them on account of it.

But, my dear brethren, I beg you to remember, that the declaration in my text is the Word of the living God, and shall surely be found true in the end. I charge you, therefore, to examine carefully into this matter.

See whether you have just views of the deceitfulness of the heart. See whether you feel so fearful of its delusions, that you determine never to take its report of anything without comparing it with the sacred records, and imploring direction from God that you may not err.

Be assured, that, until you are brought to renounce all dependence on yourselves, and to depend only on the Lord, you are not, you cannot be, in a state of acceptance with God; for, if he pronounces you to be fools, he will surely deal with you according to your proper character.

2. How **necessary** is a saving knowledge of Christ.

Until we come to know what provision God has made for us in the Son of his love, we shall of necessity continue guilty of the folly which is here reprobated. But when once we are assured that there is another in whom we may trust, and who possesses in himself all the fullness of the Godhead, we are encouraged to look beyond ourselves, and to place our confidence in him. Now the Lord Jesus Christ is that person, who is sent of God for that very end, and "is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Here, then, we have all that our necessities can require. By this, all temptation to creature-confidence is cut off; for who would lean upon a broken reed, who has Omnipotence for his support? Or who would build upon the sand, who can have for his foundation "the Rock of ages?"

Seek, then, I beg you, the knowledge of this Savior. Beg of God to show you what an inexhaustible fullness is treasured up for you in him; and how impossible it is that you should ever fail, if only you trust in him. Once begin in truth to "live by faith in the Son of God," and you "shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end!

#820

DANGER OF OBSTINACY IN SIN

**[Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1)**

"He who being often reproved, hardens his neck,  
 shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!"

Awful, most awful, is this declaration; yet is it most beneficial, and worthy of the deepest attention. Many indeed imagine that it is suited only to the dispensation of the Law; but it is no less suited to us under the Gospel. The Gospel does not consist of promises only, but of threatenings also; and Paul himself tells us, that "the day of the Lord will so come as a thief in the night; and that when men are saying, Peace and safety, then will sudden destruction come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape! [1 Thessalonians 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.2-3)."

But in discoursing on such a subject, we would exercise all imaginable tenderness; and we entreat all who are here present to lift up their hearts to God, and to implore the effectual assistance of his Spirit, that they may be enabled to "tremble at his Word," and to "receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word, which is able to save their souls."

There are two things here to which we would draw your attention;

I. The character described.

With much patience, God reproves lost sinners.

In a variety of ways he administers reproof:

At all times he speaks, silently indeed, but powerfully, to men in his Word. Every sin is there depicted in its proper colors, and marked as an object of his righteous indignation. There especially we hear him denouncing his judgments against impenitence and unbelief, "Unless you repent, you shall all perish!" "He who believes not, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him!" There too do we find him requiring of us, that we become "new creatures in Christ Jesus;" and declaring, that "unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In short, everything that is necessary for us either to know or do, is there revealed; and in every part of it God himself is addressing us day and night.

He reproves us also by his Providence. Every one of his dispensations towards us has a voice, to which we should give heed, and from which we may gain the most valuable instruction. Does he summon to his tribunal a neighbor, a friend, a relative? He says to the survivors, "Prepare to meet your God!" Does he make a severer inroad on your domestic circle, by cutting off the olive branches that were round about your table, or by "taking away the desire of your eyes with a stroke?" He bids you to seek all your happiness in him alone. By every change of whatever kind, he tells you that "this is not your rest." Nor does he speak less by mercies than by judgments. Every gift is sent to draw you to him as the Giver; and every instance of "his goodness and patience and forbearance is intended to lead you to repentance."

Further, he reproves us also by his Spirit. Who among us has not often heard his still small voice, saying to us, "Repent?" Who has not felt many checks of conscience, when he was tempted to commit iniquity? These have been no other than the motions of God's Holy Spirit within us, testifying against sin, and inviting us to serve our God! [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3).

But against his reproofs how often have we obstinately "hardened our necks!"

Many will not endure reproof at all; and, if the Word which is ministered to them by the servants of God disquiets their minds, and especially if it strikes at their besetting sin, they will vent their indignation against the faithful messenger who thus disturbs their slumbers.

The reproof given to Amaziah was so reasonable, that one would imagine it could not possibly give offence; yet behold, what resentment it kindled in the infatuated monarch! "Are you mad at the king's counsel? Forbear. Why should you be smitten! [2 Chronicles 25:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.15-16)."

Nothing could be more just than the reproof which Jeremiah was ordered to administer to the Jewish people; yet the only effect it produced was, to excite their wrath, and to make them threaten him with instant death, "When Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, then the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, took him, saying, You shall surely die! [Jeremiah 26:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.2-8)."

Herod went further still, and actually put the greatest of all the Prophets to death, for no other fault than that of telling him that he should not persevere in his adulterous relationship with his brother Philip's wife, [Matthew 14:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.3-10).

Thus it is at this day. Men indeed cannot proceed to such extremities against their reprovers now as they did in former times; but the world's enmity is the same against all who "testify of it that the works thereof are evil;" and it is owing to the protection of the laws, rather than to any diminution of men's hatred against the truth, that contempt only, and not death, is the portion of God's faithful servants!

But it is not only in a way of outward opposition that men manifest their obduracy. Many who externally approve of the faithful ministry of the word, are in reality as averse to it in their hearts. They hear the Word perhaps even with pleasure, as Ezekiel's hearers did; but they will not do it! [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32).

Say whether this is not the case with many among you; you have had the whole counsel of God declared unto you; but have you complied with it?

Are you truly brought to the foot of the cross, in deep humiliation, in earnest prayer, and in a simple reliance on the death of Jesus as your only hope?

Have you also taken his yoke upon you, so that you are daily and hourly fulfilling his will, and regarding his service as perfect freedom?

Are you dying daily to the world, and living as pilgrims and sojourners, having your citizenship in Heaven, and looking forward to the second advent of your Lord as the consummation and completion of your bliss?

If you are not thus brought to live unto your God, you have not yet complied with his reproofs; and if you are speaking peace to yourselves in such a state, then are you hardening your necks against him. In words indeed you call him Lord, Lord—but while you do not obey the things which he says, you are still among the number of those to whom he will say, "Depart from me! I never knew you, you workers of iniquity!"

Having then seen the character that is described in our text, let us consider,

II. The **judgment**denounced against him.

What but destruction can await such a character, even "destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" Yes, this is the judgment denounced against him; and his destruction.

1. The destruction of the obstinate sinner shall be **sudden**.

Frequently does God mark by some signal judgment those who have obstinately withstood his warnings and invitations.

The Ante-diluvian infidels, who would not be reclaimed by the ministry of Noah, were swept away, as soon as ever their day of grace was ended.

Likewise were Pharaoh and all his host, when they proudly set themselves in array against the Majesty of Heaven.

Ananias and Sapphira were also made examples of God's indignation against willful and deliberate sin.

But though death should come upon us gradually, as it respects the body, it may, as far as it respects our preparation for it, be altogether instantaneous. The effect of willful sin is to harden the heart, and to render us more and more indisposed for repentance. It also grieves the Holy Spirit of God, and provokes him to withdraw those gracious influences which he has hitherto given. When delaying our repentance, we are apt to imagine that we shall in a time of sickness have such a favorable opportunity for spiritual exercises, as will abundantly make up for all the time that we have lost; but when sickness comes, we find that we cannot realize all our fond expectations; the state of our bodies perhaps unfits us for exertion; and the indisposition of our mind for holy things in become more deeply rooted, no that we cannot relent, or humble ourselves before God. The Word of God, when we look into it, is only as a sealed book. The instructions we receive, produce no effect. Even during their full enjoyment of bodily health many are given over to final impenitence, so that the ministry of the Word serves only to harden them, and the Gospel itself becomes to them only "a savor of death!" See [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10), which is quoted six times in the New Testament. See also [Jeremiah 7:23-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.23-27).

God gives them over to judicial blindness, and leaves them to harden themselves in order to their more aggravated condemnation. Thus he dealt with the sons of Eli, [1 Samuel 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.25); and thus he has declared he will deal with us, if we willfully reject his tender solicitations, [Proverbs 1:24-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-31); Thus may death come in its most gradual and protracted form, and yet, as far as respects our souls, be as sudden, as if it visited us like a thief in the night.

2. The destruction of the obstinate sinner shall be **irremediable**.

If once God says to his Holy Spirit, "Strive no longer with that man; he is joined to idols; let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)"—then the man is in fact left to irremediable destruction. He will live only to "fill up the measure of his iniquities," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath!"

But at all events, the very instant that death arrests us, our day of grace is terminated!

There is no repentance in the grave.

There is no possibility of passing the gulf that is fixed between Heaven and Hell.

The worm that gnaws the conscience will never die.

The fire that torments the body will never be quenched.

The wrath to come will ever be the wrath to come.

What a fearful thought it is, that of those to whom the Word of salvation is now preached, many will "come at last into that place of torment," and many, who, like the foolish virgins, once had the lamp of outward profession, and associated with the wise virgins, will, instead of being admitted to the marriage supper of their Lord, be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth!"

May the Lord grant that none of you may ever experience this doom! yet it is certain, that if you harden your necks against either the precepts of the Law or the promises of the Gospel, this will be your state forever!

To put you more effectually on your guard, let me ADDRESS:

1. Those who will not submit to God's reproofs.

The word delivered to you, so far as it accords with God's revealed will, is God's, and not ours. We are his ambassadors; and it is He who speaks to you by our mouth. Indeed, whoever he is that gives you the counsels of true wisdom, he is God's representative to you. Think then, you who have rejected the counsels of your friends, and the admonitions of your ministers, what will be your reflections in the last day; when you call to mind the instructions once given by your parents, the advice offered by some pious friend or relative, the warnings delivered by God's servants in the public assembly—how distressing will it be to see that they were only the means of aggravating your eternal condemnation! Oh! let me prevail with you, before it is too late. Consider, I beg you, "Who ever hardened himself against God, and prospered?" Today then, while it is called today, harden not your hearts, lest you provoke God to swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest!

2. Those who are inclined to obey his will.

Truly this disposition is of the Lord, "it is he who has given you either to will or do." Bless him, then, that the destruction which has come suddenly and irremediably on so many millions of mankind, was not permitted to come on you in your unawakened state. And now let your hearts be right with him; let every word of his sink down into your ears, and be obeyed without reserve. Seek an entire conformity to his mind and will. "Forget all that is behind, and reach forward constantly to that which is before." Seek to "grow up in all things into Christ, your living Head." Make more and more use of that remedy which is in your hands. Apply the precious blood of Christ more and more to your souls, to purge you from your sins; and seek more abundant supplies of the Spirit of grace, to transform you into the Divine image. So shall you be happy now in the prospect of your inheritance, and be progressively rendered fit for your full possession of it.

#821

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOSPEL MINISTRATIONS

**[Proverbs 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.18)**

"Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he who keeps the Law, happy is he!"

[The following brief sketch is given as a useful subject for a Mission Sermon. The contrast between Heathen in an ignorant and in a converted state would be very striking.]

Throughout the whole Scriptures, we have one unvaried testimony respecting man. We see, in every part:

I. The deplorable state of those who know not the Gospel.

Revelations to the prophets were often made in visions; and hence the subject-matter of the revelation was called their "vision." Now, where no revelation is, or where, though given, it is not attended to, "the people perish!"

This is the unhappy state of the heathen world, who are constantly represented as dead in trespasses and sins, and as under the dominion of Satan! [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1); [Ephesians 2:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.11-13). [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19). [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19). We have no authority to depart from the plain declarations of Holy Writ.

Still more is this the state of God's ancient people, while they reject the Messiah, [Isaiah 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.11). [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.6). [John 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.24).

But far worse is the state of those who hear, without obeying, the Gospel, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22). [2 Corinthians 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.3-4). [2 Thessalonians 1:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.7-8). [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3). [1 Peter 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17).

II. The blessedness of those who **hear**and **obey**the Gospel.

Our Lord pronounces them supremely blessed, [Luke 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.28). And there is somewhat very emphatic in the declaration of it contained in our text.

Those who truly believe in Christ, and live altogether by faith in him, "are happy." They are happy,  
as restored to God's favor, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1),  
as enjoying his presence, [Psalm 89:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.5),  
as inheriting his glory, [Revelation 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.14).

Observe from hence.

1. The importance of missionary exertions. [Romans 10:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.13-15); [Romans 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.17).

2. The importance of improving our present privileges.

On the due improvement of them depends both our present and eternal happiness!

#822

THE FEAR OF MAN

**[Proverbs 29:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.25)**

"The fear of man brings a snare; but whoever puts his trust in the Lord shall be safe!"

Our blessed Lord, at the very first introduction of his religion into the world, told his followers, that he had not come to send peace on earth, but a sword, and to set at variance with each other the nearest and dearest relatives. We are not however to suppose that this was the proper end of his religion; it was not the end, but the effect; and it is, and must be, the effect, as long as there shall be a carnal and unregenerate man upon earth!

What, then, must be done by the followers of Christ? Must they draw back, because their carnal friends forbid them to proceed? or must they put their light under a bushel, lest it should offend the eyes of those who behold it? No! They must dismiss from their minds all fear of men, and be faithful to their God at all events; for "the fear of man brings a snare;" which they can only avoid by giving themselves up faithfully to their God.

I. From the words before us, we learn **our great danger**.

The fear of man is far more general than we are at all aware of.

Ungodly men, who, in relation to all other things, set at defiance the whole world—are yet, almost as much as others, in bondage, in reference to religion. They can set at nothing all religion, without any fear at all; but, to show respect for it, and especially a desire to become acquainted with it, they dare not. They see that there are people whose ministry would prove instructive; but they fear to avail themselves of such a ministry, lest a suspicion should attach to them as leaning towards a holy life, and as inclined to opinions which are generally decried. And, as for cultivating an acquaintance with one of strict piety, however much they may wish, they dare not do it, lest they incur ridicule from their ungodly companions!

People who begin to feel any concern about their souls are immediately beset with this evil principle. They are conscious that the change which is taking place in them will, of necessity, offend their former companions; and therefore they desire to conceal their feelings, and to avoid the rupture which they foresee. Hence they make many compliances contrary to the convictions of their own conscience; and expose themselves to many temptations, which their better judgment would have taught them to avoid. So common is this bondage, that scarcely anyone is free from it. Whatever men's rank in life is, they are still in subjection to their fellows; yes, the higher their station, the greater, for the most part, is their cowardice.

Nor are established believers free from this thraldom! They do indeed disregard the world; but they are as much enslaved by the maxims and habits of their associates in the church, as ever they were by the world around them. They dare not think for themselves, or act for themselves, according to the convictions of their own minds. They take not their faith and practice from the Scriptures of Truth, but from a standard which rules among them, and from which they are afraid to deviate.

Who would think that Peter himself, bold and intrepid as he was by nature, and still more fortified by grace, should yet yield so far to the prejudice of his Judaizing brethren, as even to endanger the utter subversion of the Gospel, which he had been the honored instrument of first opening both to the Jewish and Gentile world? Yet so he did, through fear of their displeasure.

Who, then, has not cause to acknowledge himself in danger of erring, through the operation of this evil principle?

To all who yield to the influence of the fear of man, it brings a fatal snare!

Thousands it keeps from coming within the reach of spiritual instruction. The fear of that expostulation, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him? [John 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.20)," is quite sufficient to intimidate the generality of men, whom curiosity at least might otherwise bring within the sphere of spiritual instruction. And in those of whom better things might have been hoped, the fear of man has wrought, in unnumbered instances, to the production of the most tremendous evils—moral, spiritual, and eternal!

Behold in Peter a dissimulation, which led even Barnabas astray. They, through mercy, were recovered; but many it has led to utter apostasy, and involved in everlasting ruin! In the days of our blessed Lord many were "afraid to confess him, because they loved the praise of men more than the honor that comes from God;" and many who had followed him "went back, and walked no more with him!" In the same way, every age, even to the present hour, have many been turned aside by the dread of persecution! [Matthew 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.21), and have "made shipwreck of their faith." And what the outcome of this is to their souls, we are told; for "the fearful and unbelieving," no less than "murderers and whoremongers, have their portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death! [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)." In truth, our adorable Savior warned his hearers respecting this, from the very beginning; declaring to them at all times, that those who would be ashamed of him, and deny him—would assuredly find him ashamed of them, and would be ultimately denied by him in the presence of his Father and of the whole assembled universe!

Seeing, then, that we are all exposed to this danger, it will be expedient that I point out to you,

II. From the words before us, we learn **the only proper effectual antidote to the fear of man**.

There is nothing but a regard to God himself that can ever overcome the fear of man; on which account our blessed Lord says, "Do not fear man who can only kill the body, and after that has no more that he can do; but fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell, [Matthew 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.28)." The same truth is suggested in my text, only in somewhat of a more gentle form, "Whoever puts his trust in the Lord, shall be safe."

Would we then be delivered from the foregoing snare:

1. Let us put our trust in God, for **happiness**.

A man who is dependent on the world for his happiness, must of necessity be in bondage to its maxims, its habits, and its votaries. But one whose heart is fixed upon God, and who looks up to God as his portion, feels himself at liberty. It is to him a small matter whether the world frowns or smiles. All that he is anxious about, is, to retain the favor of God, and to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon him. His interest, his reputation, his life may be endangered; but he smiles at the vain attempts of his enemies. They may shut him up from all access of earthly friends; but they cannot deprive him of communion with God; on the contrary, his communications from God are, for the most part, enlarged, in proportion as man's efforts to distress him are increased. "When God gives quietness, who then can make trouble Job? 34:29."

2. Let us put our trust in God, for **support**.

A man, when threatened by earthly enemies, is driven to the Lord for support; and, O! what strength does he find communicated to him in the hour of need! Assured of strength according to his day, the believer disregards the utmost efforts of his persecutors. The furnace may be heated seven times more than usual, or the lions have their appetites whetted for their prey; but his mind is in peace, because he "knows in whom he has believed, and that God is able to keep that which has been committed to him." Whether he shall be delivered by God from his trials, or be supported under them, he knows not; but he is assured, that whatever be done by his enemies, shall "work together for his good;" and that, in the outcome, he shall "prove more than a conqueror, through Him who loved him!"

3. Let us put our trust in God, for **recompense**.

To Heaven the believer looks, as his final rest; and in the prospect of that, all the transitory events of time become of no account in his estimation. The crown of victory and of glory is ever in his view; and he knows the condition on which alone it will be bestowed; we must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would obtain a crown of life." Hence he finds no difficulty in renouncing all that the world can give, and in enduring all that the most bitter persecutors can inflict; because, like Moses, he "looks unto the recompense of the reward;" and, like the "women who refused to accept deliverance from their tortures, he expects a better resurrection."

Whatever tribulations he may pass through in his way to glory, he feels no doubt but that the glory which awaits him will amply make amends for all! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18).

For an **improvement** of this subject, I will add,

1. A word of **caution**.

The foregoing opinions, if not received with a befitting spirit, are liable to abuse. Indeed we have often seen, in young and inexperienced people especially, conceit and self-will assuming the garb of religion; and exerting themselves, without control, in opposition to all sound advice, and in defiance of all legitimate authority.

Let me, therefore, be well understood in this matter. Though we are to be on our guard against the fear of man, we are not to set at nothing the counsels of the wise, nor the injunctions of those who are over us in the Lord. In matters of indifference, it is well to consult the judgment and the wishes of those who are in authority over us. It is only when the counsels and commands of men go counter to the commands of God, that we are authorized to set them at nothing; and even then we must conduct ourselves with meekness and modesty, and must not give way to a rude, unmannered, refractory spirit.

This is of exceeding great importance. We cannot too strictly watch against the indulgence of any unhallowed character under the pretext of religion; and if at any time we are constrained to oppose the wishes of our friends, we must order ourselves with such kindness and love, as may leave them in no doubt but that our perseverance is the fruit of real piety, and not the offspring of obstinate conceit.

2. A word of **encouragement**.

However careful we are, we must expect to incur the displeasure of those who wish to retain us in bondage to the world. But if, as we have reason to expect, our greatest foes are those of our own household—then let us consider how much better it is to have the frowns of men and the approbation of God, than the smiles of men and the displeasure of God. If all the men in the universe were to applaud us, it would be a poor recompense for the loss of a good conscience, whose testimony in our behalf would repay us for the loss of the whole world. In fact, if we inquire into the state of those who uphold each other in iniquity, we shall find that no one of them has peace in his own soul; for, how should they have peace who seek their happiness in the world rather than in God?

Compare, then, your state with theirs; and you will have reason to bless God, even though the whole world is against you. For them nothing remains but "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation;" for you is prepared an eternal weight of glory, which will be augmented in proportion to the trials which you sustained for God, and the services you rendered to him. Be of good cheer, then; for your trials do, in fact, "turn unto you for a testimony;" and "if you suffer with Christ," you are assured, by the voice of Inspiration, that "you shall also be glorified together with Him!"

#823

A SAINT'S VIEWS OF HIMSELF

**[Proverbs 30:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.1-2)**

"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy; the man spoke unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal, Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man!" KJV

"The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh--an oracle: This man declared to Ithiel, to Ithiel and to Ucal: "I am the most ignorant of men; I do not have a man's understanding!" NIV

The sayings of the wise and good have in all ages been regarded with veneration, and been treasured up in the minds of men as a kind of sacred deposit, for the enriching and instructing of future generations. We have here a very remarkable saying of Agur the son of Jakeh; to which I would now call your attention. It does indeed, we must confess, appear, at first sight, a rash expression, savoring rather of intemperance than of sound discretion.

But as it was delivered to "Ithiel and Ucal," who were probably his disciples; and as it was introduced with the word, "Surely," which marks it as the result of his deliberate judgment; and, above all, it being called "a prophecy," which determines it to have been inspired of God; we should calmly inquire into it, and examine its import. That such an expression may be uttered by people widely differing from each other in their moral and religious habits, I readily admit; and therefore, in order to prevent any misapprehension, I shall consider the text,

I. As the language of passion.

Sin, however fondly cherished in the heart of fallen man, is no other than folly and madness! So it is described by Solomon, in the Book of Ecclesiastes, "I applied my heart to know and to search, and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things; and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness, [Ecclesiastes 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.25)." And again, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; 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)."

When a person, who has been led captive by sin, comes to discern somewhat of its true character, he is apt to feel indignation against himself, and to reproach himself in strong terms for the folly he has committed. We may well conceive of him as saying, in the language of our text, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man." But this indignation against himself may be the mere language of passion, and not of genuine humiliation; and it may be distinguished from that which is the fruit of piety,

1. In its object.

An ungodly man may feel strongly, while he has no real humility; he may hate his actions and himself on account of them. But it is not sin that he hates, so much as the consequences of his sin! Nor does he hate all its consequences; he hates it not as defiling to his soul, as offensive to his God, as injurious to his eternal interests; but as destructive of his peace, as degrading him in the eyes of his fellow-men, and as ruinous to his present welfare.

A gamester, who has staked his all upon the cast of dice, and has thereby reduced himself and his family from affluence to want, curses his folly with the most indignant feelings; and so hates himself for it, that he can scarcely endure his very existence. But, if his money were restored, he would do the same again; or, if taught wisdom by experience, he would not refrain from his former habits on account of any regard for God or his own soul, but only on account of the injury that was likely to accrue from them in a temporal view.

The same may be said respecting the votaries of dissipation. When their fortune is wasted by extravagance, and their constitution ruined by excess, they may be strongly impressed with the folly and madness of their past ways; while, if they could be restored to their former affluence and vigor, they would run the very same career again.

Under all the painful consequences of his licentious habits, the debauched can scarcely avoid those reflections which Solomon represents as arising in his mind, "At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly! [Proverbs 5:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.11-14)."

Nor can we doubt, but that in Hell those reflections will be both universal and exceedingly bitter; for the "wailing and gnashing of teeth" which will be there experienced, will arise, in no small degree, from the consideration of the opportunities once enjoyed, but now irrecoverably and forever lost! [Matthew 13:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.42).

2. In its operation.

The indignation of an ungodly man is sudden and transient; and is always accompanied with an incrimination of those who have been in any measure accessary to the evils that have come upon him.

But, in a man of piety, they are the fruit of deep reflection, dwelling habitually in the mind, and always attended with self-reproach.

We may see in the prodigal son a holy exhibition of that which arises from genuine repentance. He does not, under the pressure of his distress, cry out with vehement exclamations, designating his conduct by every term that an embittered spirit can suggest; but he adopts a resolution to return to his father's house, and there, in measured and contrite language, confesses, "I have sinned against Heaven and before you; and am no more worthy to be called your son!"

Generally speaking, the more violent the expressions are, the less genuine is the contrition from which they flow. The exercise of deep and just feeling is rather in a way of temperate humility, than of vehement and fluent exaggeration. The two kinds of indignation may be easily distinguished by their attendant feelings:  
the one is the fruit of wounded pride, and the root of everything that is unhallowed, whether in word or deed;  
the other is the offspring of deep contrition for his sin; and either the parent or the child of genuine conversion to God.

Having discriminated, we hope, sufficiently between the expressions of our text as used by people of opposite characters, and shown how to distinguish them when uttered as the language of passion, we proceed to notice them,

II. As the language of piety.

We know assuredly that indignation is a fruit of godly sorrow; for Paul says to the Corinthians, "See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done, [2 Corinthians 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.11)."

And we have seen it operate precisely as in the text, when, according to common apprehension, there would appear to be but little occasion for it. David, seeing the prosperity of the wicked, and not duly adverting to their end, had envied them; and in the review of his conduct he exclaims, "So foolish was I, and ignorant; I was even as a beast before you! [Psalm 73:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3); [Psalm 73:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.17); [Psalm 73:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.22)."

Nor are such views uncommon to the saints; or rather, I should say, there is no true saint who does not on some occasions apply them to himself.

If it is asked, 'How can such expressions fall from the lips of a real saint?' I answer, they necessarily spring:

1. From a view of the holy **law** under which we live.

While ignorant of the spirituality and extent of God's Law, we take credit to ourselves for our external conformity to its precepts; and are ready to imagine, that, "concerning the righteousness of the Law we are blameless, [Philippians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.6)." But when we come to see how "broad the commandment is, [Psalm 119:96](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.96)," that it reaches to the inmost thoughts of the soul, prohibiting even so much as an inordinate desire, and requiring us to "love and serve our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength," we are struck dumb; our towering "imaginations are cast down;" and, like the Apostle Paul, we feel the sentence of death gone forth against us, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9), and attaching to us no less for our best deeds, than for the most sinful action of our lives! [Job 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2-3)." Then we become observant of our defects; and, O! how loathsome are we then in our own eyes, [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31), in the view of that very obedience of which we once thought so highly! It is no wonder, if, with this augmented new of his own deformity, the saint speak of himself in very humiliating and degrading terms.

A person coming into a room at night with a lighted candle, would see but little; if he returned at the dawn of day, he would have a clearer view of all the objects that before were scarcely visible; but, if he entered when the sun was shining forth in its strength, he would discern the smallest specks of dirt, and even the very motes in the air. But would he then conclude that all the dust and dirt which he now beheld had been cast in since his first entrance? No; he would know to what he must ascribe the change in his views, even to the increased light by which he was enabled to take the survey. And so a clearer view of God's holy Law will give us a deeper insight into our own deformity, and turn the gloryings of self-esteem into the mournings of humiliation and contrition!

2. From a view of that holy **God** against whom we have sinned.

The least knowledge of God is sufficient to abase us before him; but the more we behold his glorious perfections, the more shall we stand amazed at the coldness of our love to him, and our lack of zeal in his service.

Job, previous to his troubles, was considered as "a perfect man" even by God himself. But when God had revealed himself more fully to his soul, how base did this holy man appear in his own eyes! "Behold, I am vile!" says he. "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, [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5-6)."

This will be the effect of all God's manifestations of himself, whether in a way of providence or of grace. It is impossible to behold God's goodness, his patience, his forbearance, and not stand amazed at our own sinfulness. "The ox and the donkey" do not appear so brutish as we, [Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.3); nor "the stork or crane or swallow" so unobservant of the things which we are most concerned to notice, [Jeremiah 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.7); and our only wonder is, that it should be possible for God to endure with such patience our great and multiplied iniquities!

3. From a view of the **obligations** we lie under.

Our love to God will bear proportion to the sense we have of the extent of his mercy towards us in forgiveness, [Luke 7:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47). But, when we reflect on the means he has used, in order to open a way for the exercise of his mercy towards us, what shall we not account his due? When we consider that he has "not spared even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," what bounds will there be to our gratitude; or rather, what bounds will there be to our humiliation for the lack of gratitude? It will be impossible for us then ever to satisfy our own desires. If we had a thousand lives, we should devote them all to him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and at his call be ready to sacrifice them all for him. The services which we once thought sufficient will then appear little better than a solemn mockery; so entirely will our souls be absorbed in wonder at the thought of an incarnate God, a crucified Redeemer.

4. From a view of the interests we have at stake.

If only the life or death of our bodies were at stake, we would feel deeply interested in the event; but, when Heaven end all its glory, or Hell and all its misery, are the alternatives before us, one would suppose that every temporal consideration should be swallowed up, and vanish as the light of a star before the meridian sun. But the saint is not always so indifferent to the things of time and sense as he would wish to be. There are times when everything below the sun is in his eyes lighter than vanity itself; but there are, also, times when he finds his heart yet cleaving to the dust, and when his heavenward progress is slow and imperceptible. On such occasions he is amazed at himself; he can scarcely conceive it possible that, with such prospects before him, he should be so stupid and brutish as he feels himself to be. Truly, at these seasons the language of our text will be often in his heart, and in his mouth too, especially if he finds an Ithie, or an Ucal, who is capable of understanding it.

After viewing this subject, we shall be at no loss to understand,

1. Why it is that saints are often dejected in their minds.

None are at all times alike joyful. Paul says, that "they who have the first-fruits of the Spirit," no less than others, sometimes "groan within themselves, being burdened, [Romans 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.23). [2 Corinthians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.4)." And so it ought to be.

In the review of their past lives they should be humbled, even as Paul was, when he designated himself as "a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor, and the very chief of sinners! [1 Timothy 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13); [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)."

And under a sense of their remaining infirmities, it befits them to lie low before God. Behold Paul, when he had preached the Gospel for over twenty years—yet felt so much corruption within him, that he cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death? [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24)." The image which he here uses is that which has often been realized. He refers to a punishment sometimes inflicted on criminals, by chaining them to a dead corpse, and constraining them to bear it about with them, until they died through the offensiveness of its noxious odors. Such was his in-dwelling corruption to him, even at that advanced period of his life; and such it should be felt by every saint on earth. In truth, there should not enter so much as a ray of comfort into the soul, but from a view of the Sun of Righteousness. It is He alone that can, or ought, to "arise upon us with healing in his wings." And therefore the Apostle, after the lamentation just mentioned, adds, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! [Romans 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.25)."

Do not let this, then, prove a stumbling-block to any; nor let it be supposed, that, because a pious person uses, in reference to himself, terms which a worldly person would not deign to use, he must of necessity have committed any greater sin than others. His humiliation, as we have seen, arises out of the views which he has obtained of holy things; and the nearer his fellowship with God is, the move ready will he be to exclaim with the Prophet, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." That is: I am a leper, in the midst of a leprous and ungodly world! [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5).

2. How far they are from piety who are filled with self-exalting thoughts.

People who have been exemplary in their conduct, and punctual in their religious observances, are, for the most part, filled with a conceit of their own goodness, and confident of their acceptance with God on account of it. But little do they know how odious they are in the sight of God, while they are righteous in their own eyes. It is the Publican, and not the Pharisee, who will be justified before God; and "the sick, not the whole," that will experience "the Physician's" aid.

Christianity is not a remedial law, lowered to the standard of our weakness; but a remedy, by which the soul that is sick unto death may be effectually healed. Christ is a Savior; but he is so to those alone who feel themselves lost, and renounce every other hope but him. Bear this, then, in remembrance.

Bear in remembrance, that there are no terms too humiliating to express the state of your souls before God. You have lived as without God in the world, unconscious of his eye upon you; and his address to you is, "Understand you brutish among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise! [Psalm 94:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.8)." This may be offensive to our proud hearts; but it is such an address as we merit, and such a one as it becomes a holy God to deliver.

The particular ground of Agur's self-abasement was, that "he had not learned wisdom, or attained the knowledge of the Holy One, verse 3." And have not many among you the same ground for self-abasement? Yes, "There are many among you who have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame! [1 Corinthians 15:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.34)." Many among you have never yet walked in the ways of true wisdom. Humble yourselves, therefore, for your more than brutish stupidity; and now, as the Psalmist says, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him! [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12)."

#824

AGUR'S WISH

**[Proverbs 30:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.7-9)**

"Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die; Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full, and deny you, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." KJV

"Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep vanity 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." NIV

It is the privilege of a holy man to make known his requests to God in prayer, and to solicit from him whatever may conduce to his spiritual good. Even temporal things may be asked, provided it is in subservience to our spiritual interests, and with entire submission to the Divine will. Who Agur was, we cannot certainly determine; but he was evidently an inspired person. His words are called "prophecies." verse 1; and his prayer in reference to his condition in this world is an excellent pattern for our imitation. He entreated the Lord with very great earnestness; yet he considered his condition in this world as altogether subordinate to his eternal welfare; and therefore in what he asked for his body, he consulted only the good of his soul.

We propose to consider,

I. Agur's request.

Some interpret the former of his petitions as expressing a wish to be kept from error and delusion in spiritual matters; but we apprehend that the things which he requested were:

1. A removal from the temptations of an exalted state.

He justly characterizes the pomp and splendor of the world as "vanity and lies."

"Vanity," because they are empty and unsatisfying.

"Lies," because they promise happiness to their possessors, but invariably disappoint them.

In this light they are frequently represented in Scripture, [Psalm 119:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.37); [Psalm 62:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.9); and they who have been most competent to judge respecting them, have been most forward to declare them mere vanity and vexation of spirit! [Ecclesiastes 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.11).

Agur surely beheld them in this view, and therefore rather deprecated them as evils, than desired them as objects of his ambition.

2. A modest state and condition.

He did not, through a dread of wealth, desire to be reduced to poverty; he wished rather to stand at an equal distance from each extreme; and to enjoy that only which God should judge necessary for him. It is not easy for us to say precisely what a competency is; because it must vary according to men's education and habits; that being poverty to one, which would be riches to another; yet the line drawn by Agur, seems to mark the limits most agreeably to the mind of God, because it exactly corresponds with the views:  
of patriarchs, [Genesis 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.20),  
of prophets, [Jeremiah 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 45.5),  
of Apostles, [1 Timothy 6:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.8-10),  
and particularly with the prayer which our blessed Lord himself has taught all his followers to use, [Matthew 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.11) and the first clause of verse 13; between which and Agur's prayer there is a remarkable agreement.

In urging his request, Agur manifested great zeal and earnestness; his whole soul appeared to be engaged in it. We are therefore interested in inquiring into,

II. The reasons with which Agur enforced his request.

He was not actuated by any carnal motives, though he was praying about carnal things. It was not the incumbrances of wealth, or the hardships of poverty that he dreaded; he considered only the aspect of the different states upon his spiritual advancement; and deprecated them equally on account of the temptations incident to both.

1. On account of the snares of **wealth**.

Riches foster the pride of the human heart, and engender a haughty and independent spirit. This was the effect of opulence on God's people of old, "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior!" [Deuteronomy 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.15). [Hosea 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.6); and the same baneful influence is observable in our day.

The wealthy consider it almost as an act of condescension to acknowledge God. Scarcely one of them in a thousand will endure to hear his name mentioned in private, or his will propounded as the proper rule of his conduct. The atheistical expressions in the text are indeed the language of his conduct, if not also of his lips. See [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2). [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4).

It is on this, as well as other accounts, that our Lord has spoken of riches as rendering our salvation difficult, yes impossible, without some signal interposition of divine grace! [Matthew 19:23-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.23-26). Therefore every one who values his soul may well deprecate an exalted state.

2. On account of the snares of **poverty**.

Poverty has its snares no less than wealth; where its pressure is felt, the temptations to dishonesty are exceeding great. Even those who are in ease and affluence are too easily induced to deviate from the paths of strict integrity, especially when there appears but little probability of detection; how much more strongly then may a dishonest principle be supposed to operate, when called forth by necessity and distress! God appointed that a person suspected of theft should clear himself by an oath before a magistrate, [Exodus 22:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 22.7-12) and [1 Kings 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.31); but this was a feeble barrier against dishonesty; for he who will cheat, will lie; and, if urged to it, will rather perjure himself to conceal his crime, than expose himself to shame by confessing it.

Thus one sin leads to another; and a soul, that is of more value than ten thousand worlds, is bartered for some worthless commodity! Justly then may that state also be deprecated, which exposes us to such tremendous evils.

This subject may teach us:

1. Contentment with our lot.

Whatever are the means used, it is God alone who fixes our condition in the world. If we are Christians indeed, we may be sure that our lot is that which, all things considered, is most for the good of our souls. If any variations in it have taken place, such changes have been sent to teach us that contentment, which Paul so richly experienced, and which it is no less our privilege than our duty to learn, [Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12). If we have that which is best for our *souls*, then we have that which is really best.

2. Watchfulness against our besetting sins.

Every situation of life has its peculiar temptations.

Youth or old age,  
health or sickness,  
riches or poverty  
—all have their respective snares! It is our wisdom to stand on our guard against the difficulties to which we are more immediately exposed, [2 Samuel 22:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 22.24); and rather to seek for grace that we may approve ourselves to God in the station to which he has called us, than to desire a change of circumstances, which will change indeed, but not remove, our trials.

3. Solicitude for spiritual advancement.

As surely sin is the greatest of all evils—it was sin, and sin alone, that Agur feared! Let the same mind then be in us that was in him. Whether we have poverty or riches, or whether we are equally removed from both—let us endeavor to improve in spirituality and holiness. Then will the wisdom of God, in appointing such a variety of states, be made manifest; and the collective virtues of the different classes will then shine with combined luster, and, like the rays of the sun, display the glory of Him from whom they sprang!

#825

THE SELF-DECEIVER EXPOSED

**[Proverbs 30:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.12)**

"There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness!" KJV

"There are those who are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not cleansed of their filth!" NIV

Men of themselves are very backward to form an unfavorable estimate of their own character. Hence arises the necessity of accurate discrimination and undaunted fidelity in ministers, whose office is to "separate the precious from the vile," and to give to every one his portion in due season. The Scriptures draw a broad line of distinction between the righteous and the wicked; and this, not in their actions only, but in their dispositions and habits; by which the different characters may be as clearly discerned as by their outward conduct.

The generation of self-deceivers is very numerous; multitudes there are who stand high in their own estimation, while in God's eyes they are as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Among these we must number:

I. The decent formalist.

He is "pure in his own eyes".

He is punctual in the observance of outward duties, both civil and religious. He will attend constantly at the house of God, and even at the table of the Lord; he will also establish worship in his family; and in respect of his dealings with men, he will be all that is amiable and lovely; he will be honest, sober, just, temperate, benevolent; as far as the letter of the law goes, he may be blameless.

In such a state, what wonder is it if he is pure in his own eyes? He understands not the spirituality of the law, and can judge of himself only by the defective standard of heathen morality. By the world he is admired, and held up as a pattern of all excellence; and seeing that he stands high in the esteem of others, he almost of necessity entertains a high opinion of himself.

But he "is not washed from his filthiness".

Much filthiness there is in the heart of every man by nature; and there is a filthiness which every person may properly call his own, as being congenial with his own feelings, and particularly connected with his own character.

With the character before us there is a very abundant measure of pride, venting itself in a constant habit of self-confidence and self-delight. Combined with this are impenitence and unbelief; for how is it possible that he should repent and believe, when he knows not the extent of his guilt and danger? "Being whole, he feels no need of a physician."

He is altogether under the dominion also of worldly-mindedness. When he has performed his religious duties, he goes to worldly company, without feeling any need, or being sensible of any danger. The friendship of the world is what he delights in as his chief good, never once suspecting, that this very disposition proves and constitutes him an enemy of God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). Thus, though there is nothing in him that the world disapproves, and nothing that seems to call for self-reproach, he is under the habitual and allowed dominion of evils, which render him abominable in the sight of God! [Luke 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.15). He has somewhat of "the form of godliness, but none at all of its power! [2 Timothy 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5)."

Among this generation we must also number,

II. The **almost**Christian.

He goes much farther than the decent formalist.

He is convinced of the truth and excellence of Christianity, and wishes to be a partaker of its benefits. He will vindicate the faithful servants of God against the accusations brought against them by the ungodly world; and will actually comply with many things which the Gospel requires.

From this partial change in himself, he begins to think that he is a Christian indeed. His constrained approbation of the Gospel appears to him to be a cordial acceptance of it; and his slender performances of its duties are in his estimation like an unreserved obedience.

But, like the decent formalist, the almost Christian deceives his own soul.

He will not renounce all for Christ. When our Lord says, "Go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and come and follow me," he departs sorrowful, like the Rich Youth, and chooses the world in preference to Christ. He draws back also from the cross, which he will not bear. He is ashamed of Christ, even at the very time that he shows some regard both for his Word and ministers. He will not "come out from the world and be separate;" but still remains conformed to it, to its maxims, its habits, its spirit, and its company. Of the true Christian, our Lord says, "You are not of this world, even as I am not of the world;" but of the almost Christian, the very reverse is true; he strives to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and Mammon; and if this cannot be done, he will forego his eternal interests, rather than sacrifice his worldly interests, and subject himself to the scorn and hatred of the ungodly.

Thus, though pure in his own eyes, he is yet in bondage to the fear of man; and gives a decided preference to this world, before the preservation of a good conscience, and the approbation of his God.

To the same class belongs also,

III. The inconsistent professor.

Who is more confident of the goodness of his state, than he who professes to believe in Christ?

The man who has felt some conviction of sin, and some hope in Christ, and has been hailed by others as a sound convert to the Christian faith, is ready to conclude that all is well. His successive emotions of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow—are to him a sufficient evidence, that his conversion is unquestionable. If he has some ability to talk about the Gospel, and some gift in prayer, he is still further confirmed in his persuasion, that there exists in him no ground for doubt or fear. More especially, if he have views of the Covenant of grace, as "ordered in all things and sure," and has adopted a crude system of religion that favors a blind confidence, he concludes at once that he is, and must be, a child of God.

But who is more open to self-deception?

Professors of the Gospel are very apt to forget that rule of judging which our Lord himself has prescribed, "By their fruits you shall know them, [Matthew 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.16)." But this is the only safe criterion whereby to judge of our state before God. Yet, when brought to this test, how low do many religious professors appear! They can talk of the Gospel fluently; but, if their spirit and character are inquired into, they are found to be under the habitual dominion of some besetting sin, as they were before they ever thought of religion. It is lamentable to think what "filthiness there is both of flesh and spirit," from which many who profess the Gospel have never yet been "washed, [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16);" yet an inspired Apostle declares, that "if a man seems to be religious and bridles not his tongue, he deceives himself, and his religion is vain, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)."

What then must be the state of those who yet remain:  
proud and passionate,  
worldly-minded and covetous,  
false and dishonest,  
impure and sensual,  
yes, and grossly defective in all the duties of their place and station?

Truly, of all the people belonging to the generation spoken of in our text, these are in the greatest danger, because their confidence is founded in the idea that they have already bathed in the fountain which alone is able to cleanse them from their sin.

Address,

1. Those who, though pure in their own eyes, are not washed from their filthiness.

Happy would it be if men would relax the confidence which they are ever ready to maintain of the safety of their state before God. Every one conceives that whatever others may do, he deceives not his own soul; yet behold so great is the number of self-deceivers, that they constitute "a generation!" Beloved, learn to try yourselves by the only true test: your conformity to the will of God, and to the example of Christ! It is in the balance of the sanctuary, and not in your own balance, that you are to weigh yourselves; for in that shall you be weighed at the last day; and if you are found lacking in that, the measure of your deficiency will be the measure of your condemnation!

2. Those who, though **not** pure in their own eyes, are really washed from their filthiness.

Blessed be God! there is a generation of these also. Many who once wallowed in all manner of filthiness, are now washed from it, even as the Corinthian converts were! [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-11). Yet they are not pure in their own eyes; on the contrary, they are of all people most ready to suspect themselves, [Matthew 26:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.21-22), and to "loath themselves" for their remaining imperfections.

See how strikingly this is exemplified in the very chapter before us. Agur was a man of unquestionable piety; yet, under a sense of his great unworthiness, he complained, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man! Proverbs 30; Proverbs 2." This may appear to many to be extravagant; but it is the real feeling of many a child of God; I may add too, it is their frequent confession before God. Such were the feelings of Job, of Isaiah, and of Paul [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6). [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5). [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18); [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24).

If it is asked, Whence arises this, that such holy and heavenly people should be so far from being pure in their own eyes?

The reason is that they try themselves by a more perfect standard, and from their clearer discoveries of the path of duty are more deeply conscious of their aberrations from it.

Their love of holiness also makes them now to abhor themselves more for their lack of conformity to the Divine image, than they once did even for the grossest sins.

To you then, dearly Beloved, I would address myself in the language of consolation and encouragement. It is well that you see and lament your vileness, provided you make it only an occasion of humiliation, and not of despondency. The more lowly you are in your own eyes, the more exalted you are in God's, who has said, that "he who humbles himself shall be exalted." Let your sense of your remaining imperfections make you plead more earnestly with your God that reviving promise, "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you! [Ezekiel 36:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25). [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9)."

Remember that you are not to wash yourselves first, and then to lay hold on the promises; but to embrace the promises first, and then by means of them to cleanse yourselves from the defilements you lament. This is the order prescribed in the Gospel, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1); and, if you will adhere to it, you shall have increasing evidence that it is the destined path of purity and peace.

#826

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

**[Proverbs 31:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 31.10)**

"Who can find a virtuous woman?  
 For her price is far above rubies!"

While we rejoice in the progress of civilization, we cannot but regret the loss of primitive simplicity. In former days, women of the highest rank did not disdain to employ themselves in the most common offices of life, [Genesis 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.6). King Lemuel, supposed by some to be Solomon himself, was exhorted by his inspired mother to select for his wife a woman who was not ashamed to occupy herself in domestic duties. The description here given of a queen, is, alas! but ill-suited to the refinement of the present age. It is rather calculated for the lower classes of the community. With a more immediate view therefore to their benefit, we shall consider it, and show:

I. The **character** of a virtuous woman.

There is no other character so fully drawn in Scripture as this. She is described by,

1. Her **industry**.

She rises early, verse 15; and when occasion requires, goes late to rest, verse 18. She encourages industry in her dependents, verse 15, and sets them an example of it herself, verse 19, willingly, verse 13, regularly, verse 27, without regarding fatigue, verse 17.

2. Her **prudence**.

She sells the produce of her labor, verse 24, and lays out her money with judgment for the permanent benefit of her family, verse 16. She provides comfortably for her family in respect of food, verse 15. and clothing, verse 21. In the margin it is "with double garments." She guards against all waste of her husband's property, verse 11, 12. She employs her leisure in improving her mind, verse 26; and conducts herself with love and kindness towards all, verse 26.

3. Her **piety**.

She is not satisfied with performing her duties towards man, but endeavors to serve God also verse 30. She accounts "the fear of God" to be the one thing needful. She labors above all things to cultivate this divine principle; she makes it the source and motive, the rule and measure, the scope and end, of all her actions; and, while she serves her God, she delights also to benefit the poor, verse 20.

Of such a character it is not easy to estimate,

II. The **worth** of a virtuous woman.

Rubies are accounted valuable among earthly treasures; but the worth of such a woman is infinitely above them.

1. She is **an ornament to her gender**.

However highly beauty is prized among men, the endowments before mentioned render their possessor incomparably more lovely! verse 30. The person possessing them must be admired in any station in life; but her excellence is then most conspicuous and most valuable, when she sustains the relations of a wife and a mother, verse 29. It is to be lamented that such characters are rarely "found" (verse 10) but the more scarce they are, the more worthy are they of our esteem.

2. She is **a blessing to her family**.

Of whatever rank they are, they cannot fail to reap much benefit from her prudent management, and pious example. If they are poor, especially, the good arising to them will be incalculable. They will enjoy a thousand comforts, of which others of their class are destitute. Their decent appearance will procure them respect, and redound to her praise, verse 23. Her children will love and honor her, and bless God on her account, verse 28. Her husband will delight in her himself, and make his boast of her to others, verse 28. They will all esteem her as a rich and continued source of domestic felicity.

3. She is **a comfort to all around her**.

The rich will be glad to aid her by their wealth and influence. The poor will find in her a friend to counsel them in difficulty, and relieve them in distress. All who behold her, will be constrained to applaud her conduct, verse 31, and many will be excited to follow her example.

We may now hope for a favorable attention, while we set before you,

III. The tendency of this institution to increase their number.

Though piety is as common among the poor as among any class of the community—yet it is very rare indeed that we can find among them a combination of the qualities before insisted on.

From lack of education they know not how to manage their affairs; and from habits of inattention, they are indisposed to learn.

But to the rising generation much good will arise from a school of industry.

The instruction which they gain in common schools, is very confined; but in this they will be taught all that can qualify them for usefulness in this world, or happiness in the next.

To read the Bible, and to fear God, will be proposed as the first objects of their attention. To qualify them for service, and to fit them to manage their own families at some future period, is the next concern we wish to promote. To call forth their own exertions, and stimulate a desire to excel, every encouragement will be afforded them. Thus habits of industry, of economy, of subordination to husbands, and of piety to God, being formed—they will fill up their future stations in life with far greater advantage to themselves, and benefit to society.

We will now consider some **objections** that may be made.

1. Among the **rich**.

Some of the rich think it better that the poor should be kept in ignorance. But these are themselves ignorant, unfeeling, and ungodly. Some of the rich have a fear that people may be needed for agricultural work; but there will always be found many who stand in need of employment.

2. Among the **poor**.

These are unwilling to forego the immediate earnings of their children. But in a little time they will earn much more than they now do. They will sooner find situations where they will live at free cost. They will probably be able at a future period to aid their parents, instead of being a grief, and perhaps a burden, to them. They will have a far better prospect of Heaven, by having their minds instructed, and their conduct regulated; than they would have had, if brought up in ignorance and sin.

We conclude with recommending the institution to your support.

If self-interest alone were consulted, the rich should help forward such institutions; for, if extensively promoted, they would soon lower the rates. But if benevolence is allowed to operate, it has unbounded scope for exercise in such institutions as these; since they render the lower orders of people more intelligent, more useful, more prosperous, and more happy.

Ecclesiastes

 The Vanity of the Creature

**[Ecclesiastes 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 1.2)**, "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "vanity of vanities; all is vanity!"

If experience entitles a man to credit, and gives weight to his testimony, we derive great advantage as to the credibility of the inspired writings. For respecting much of which the Prophets and Apostles wrote, they could 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." And if this is an advantage in reference to the excellency of religion, it may well be regarded as of some importance in reference also to the vanity of all earthly pursuits.

That there should have been a man possessed of such abundant means of gratification as Solomon was, and so ardent in the pursuit of it in every possible line, and at the same time so faithful in declaring his own experience in relation to it all, must be considered as an advantage to all subsequent generations who would hear and receive his testimony respecting the things which he had so fully tried, and so invariably proved to be vanity itself. The words before us express a conviction that admitted not of doubt, and a decision that left no room for controversy. "The Preacher" who uttered them was inspired of God, at the same time that he recorded what, from personal knowledge, he was qualified to declare.

I. In considering Solomon's testimony, I shall CONFIRM it—

The things of which he spoke were, all that the world contains; its grosser and more common pursuits of pleasure, riches, and honor, as also its more refined attainments of wisdom and knowledge.

1. All things, without exception, are vanity in their ACQUISITION.

It is not without great labor and toil that earthly distinctions are obtained. The merchant, the warrior, the philosopher will bear record, that in their respective pursuits they have endured much fatigue and many disappointments; insomuch that to one whose taste was different from theirs, they would appear to have paid too dear a price for all that they have gained.

2. All things, without exception, are vanity in their USE.

Suppose that the labors of any person have been crowned with success; What, after all, has he gained? He thought he was following something substantial—but, to his mortification, he finds that he has grasped a shadow. He has "hewn out cisterns" for himself, indeed, with great labor; but he finds, after all, that they are "broken cisterns, which can hold no water."

At the first moment, while the charm of novelty is upon them, the various objects we have attained afford a pleasing gratification to the mind: but scarcely have they been enjoyed a few days, before they lose their sweetness, and descend into the common routine of earthly comforts. The man who rolls in wealth, and he who is dignified with high-sounding titles, is soon brought to a level with his inferiors in point of actual enjoyment; and even he who has acquired knowledge, finds, that, "in having increased knowledge, he has also increased sorrow" [verse 18] because of the envy which his eminence has excited, and the uncertainty of much which he thinks he has attained.

3. All things, without exception, are vanity in their CONTINUANCE.

What is there of which a man may not be stripped? Pleasure may, in a very little time, be turned into pain. Honor may speedily be blasted by some unforeseen event. "Riches make themselves wings, and fly away!" And through disease or accident, even reason itself, with all its highest attainments, may sink into more than infantile weakness and infirmity. But grant to these things all that the most optimistic imagination can impute, how soon do they vanish away! Even life itself is but as a hand-breadth, or as a shadow that declines. The moment that death comes, "all our thoughts perish," and we "go out of the world as naked and as destitute as we came into it."

4. All things, without exception, are vanity in their OUTCOME.

Here it is that the vanity of earthly things pre-eminently appears. For in what respect can they advance our eternal happiness? Would to God that they did not so generally and so fatally obstruct it! Truly, "neither riches nor honors can profit us in the day of wrath." With our holy and heavenly Judge "there is no respect of persons." The rich and the poor will be dealt with according to one equal law—only the rich, and the great, and the learned, will be called to a more severe account in proportion to the influence they possessed, and the advantages they neglected to improve.

II. But as Solomon's testimony is unquestionably strong, I shall QUALIFY it.

Beyond all doubt, the Scriptures generally contain the same language: "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 62:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 62.9).] But stronger still is the language of the Psalmist in another place, where he says, "Truly every man at his best estate, is altogether vanity" [[Psalm 39:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 39.5).] Consider how strong and how unqualified these expressions are, and you will not expect me to say much in mitigation of them. Yet I must say that:

1. The vanity of the creature, though the same in itself, is differently felt, according to our mode of acting in reference to it.

If we give ourselves up to creature comforts, we shall be dreadfully disappointed. But if we enjoy them in subservience to God, and in subordination to higher pursuits, we shall not find them so empty as may be imagined. For God has "given to his people all things richly to enjoy" and provided only we enjoy God in them, they are both a legitimate and an abundant spring of pure delight. For, while we derive from them the happiness which they are calculated to impart, we taste not the bitterness which is infused into the cup of the mere worldling. Our enjoyments are elevated and sanctified. Our pains are moderated and changed into an occasion of praise and thanksgiving. Only let them be sought in their proper place, and they are comforts in the way to Heaven, though they can never stand to us in the place of Heaven.

2. The vanity of the creature, though the same in itself, is differently felt, according to the degree in which we blend religion with it.

True religion raises us above the creature altogether. If we have much of this world, we shall have a high enjoyment of it, because we shall make it the means of benefitting our fellow-creatures, and of honoring our God. If, on the other hand, we have little of this world, we shall still be happy, because, in having God for our portion, we can lack nothing.

There are but two lessons for the Christian to learn:  
the one is, to enjoy God in everything;  
the other is, to enjoy everything in God.

The one ennobles the rich; the other elevates the poor. All who have learned these lessons are, and must be, happy.

While, therefore, I grant the general position, that the creature is vanity—I must say, that the experience of its vanity, depends altogether on our undue pursuit of it and expectations from it. Let us only take it in the manner that God approves, and for the ends for which he has sent it, and we shall still find it, like Jacob's ladder—unsubstantial indeed it itself, but still a medium of communication between Heaven and earth; a medium of God's descent to us, and of our ascent to him.

III. In our consideration of Solomon's testimony, let us further IMPROVE it.

Much, very much, may it teach us!

1. We may learn from the vanity of the creature, to be moderate in our expectations.

If we will foolishly look for that in the creature which God never designed to be put into it, we may well expect disappointment. Even in Paradise it was not intended to stand in the place of God, or to be to us any source of solid satisfaction; how much less, then, can it be so, when sin has infused a curse into it, agreeably to what is written, "Cursed is the ground for your sake."

Let us estimate it aright, and expect from it no more than God has ordained it to impart—and we shall prove but little of its emptiness, while we have a rich and becoming enjoyment of it.

The direction of Paul is that which comes immediately to the point, and exactly suits the present occasion: "The time is short. It remains that both those who have wives be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they wept not; and those who rejoice, as though they rejoice not; and those who buy, as though they possessed not; and those who use this world, as not abusing it. For the fashion of this world is passing away" [[1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 7.29-31).] Only use the creature in this way, and you will find it no injury to your souls.

2. We may learn from the vanity of the creature, to be patient in our trials.

Trials of different kinds must come, for "the whole creation has, through the sin of man, become subject to vanity." But, in our present state, this is in reality a benefit; for, if it were not so, we would be ready to take up our rest in this world, instead of seeking "that which remains for us" in the world to come. Troubles serve to bring us near to God for the supports and consolations which we stand in need of. And shall we complain of that which brings us near to him, and proves an occasion of richer communications from him? No, truly, we should taste love, and love only, in our diversified afflictions; and look to God as sending them "for our profit, that by means of them we may be made partakers of his holiness," and fit for his glory.

3. We may learn from the vanity of the creature, to be diligent in our pursuit of better things.

In heavenly things there are no drawbacks, except those which are caused by our own defects in seeking after them. There is no vanity in love to God, or love to man—and the more we labor after them, and delight ourselves in them, the happier we shall be. Could we but give ourselves wholly to these things, we would find in them a very Heaven upon earth. To every one of you, then, I would recommend that prayer of David, "Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken me in your way!" [[Psalm 119:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.37).]

The Creature Is Vanity and Vexation

**[Ecclesiastes 1:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 1.14-15)**, "I have seen all the works which are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is lacking, cannot be numbered."

The Book of Ecclesiastes is generally supposed to have been written by Solomon after he had repented of his manifold transgressions; and it is pleasing to view it in this light: for, if it be not so, we have no record whatever of his penitence. But in this view its declarations are doubly interesting: as inspired by God, they are of Divine authority; and, as resulting from actual experience, they carry a much deeper conviction with them to our minds. Had one of the fishermen of Galilee spoken so strongly respecting the vanity of the world, we might have said that he had never had any opportunity of knowing experimentally what attractions the world possessed.

But Solomon had an ampler range for enjoyment than any other human being. As a king, he had the wealth of a nation at his command. As endued with a greater measure of wisdom than all other men, he could combine all kinds of intellectual pleasure with that which was merely sensual. As having a peaceful reign, he was free from all the alarms and disquietudes of war, and able to prosecute pleasure as the one object of his life. Every species of gratification being thus easily within his reach, he was amply qualified to judge of what the world could give; and yet, after having made the experiment, and "seen all the works that are done under the sun," he pronounced them all to be "vanity and vexation of spirit!"

Two things in our text are to be noticed:

I. The general assertion: "I have seen all the works which are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Never was any truth more capable of demonstration than this, that:

1. The world, and everything in it, is VANITY.

If we view the creature in itself, what a poor worthless thing is it! Take gold, for instance: much as it is in request, it has in itself no value—the value put on it is merely arbitrary, arising not so much from its usefulness to us, as from the scarcity of it. Iron is of infinitely greater service to mankind than gold, and would be more valued by us, if it did not happen that it is to be found in much larger quantities than gold.

So it is with jewels: the value of them is quite exalted; in themselves they are of no more use than common pebbles. He who possesses them in the greatest abundance, is in reality no richer than if he possessed so much gravel out of the pit.

Nor is anything that wealth can purchase, or anything that is associated with it, worthy of any better name than vanity.

What are high-sounding titles, but a mere sound that has its value only in the estimation of men.

We may ask the same in reference to pleasure. What is it? Let but a very small change take place in the circumstances of the person, and the pleasure shall become a pain. Or let it be enjoyed in all its fullness; whom did it ever satisfy? To whom did it ever impart any permanent delight? The more exquisite it is, the sooner does it cloy; insomuch that we are soon forced to flee from it through very lassitude and disgust. A recurrence to the same sources of gratification is far from producing the same emotions in the soul—by use and habit we become indifferent to the very things which once we most ardently affected; so poor, so empty, so transient is all that passes under the semblance and the name of pleasure.

We may say therefore of "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," that it is not only vain, but "vanity" in the abstract! "Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" [verse 2.]

2. The world, and everything in it, is VEXATION OF SPIRIT.

So far is the creature from affording any real happiness, that it is an occasion of constant vexation to the mind. The pursuit of earthly things is attended with much labor, and with much uncertainty also as to the attainment of them. When attained, they excite nothing but envy in others, and disquietude in ourselves. By reason of the casualties to which the possession of them exposes us, we are filled with care; insomuch, that those who only behold our acquisitions, often derive more pleasure from them than we who are the owners of them!

Besides, the more we have attained, the more our desires are enlarged after something unpossessed; so that our labors are never at an end; and the pain issuing from a single disappointment frequently outweighs the pleasure arising from manifold successes.

Indeed, the things from which we promise ourselves most pleasure, generally become, by some means or other, the sources of our keenest anguish. Our most optimistic expectations usually terminate in the bitterest disappointment. Yes, it not infrequently happens, that after having attained the object of our wishes, we welcome the period of our separation from it, and bless ourselves more in the loss of it, than ever we did in the acquisition.

Say then whether Solomon's testimony is not strictly true. Young people, when they hear such a sentiment avowed, are ready to think it melancholy temperament, and a libel on the whole creation. But this testimony is the very truth of God, and shall sooner or later be found true in the experience of every living man. The world, and everything in it, is a broken cistern, that disappoints the hopes of the thirsty traveler, and becomes to him, not only vanity, but "vexation of spirit." He who has most sought to satisfy himself with it, finds after all his labors, that he has only "filled his belly with the east wind" [[Job 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 15.2).]

Such is the import of the general assertion. We now proceed to notice,

II. The particular confirmation of it. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is lacking, cannot be numbered."

Two things are here specified by Solomon, as strongly illustrating the foregoing truth. Namely, that:

However much we may exert ourselves,

1. However much we may exert ourselves, we cannot alter that which is unfavorable. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight."

Every man, by the very constitution of his nature, is dependent on his fellow-man for the greater portion of his happiness. The welfare of a whole empire depends on the wisdom and prudence of the prince—as the prince's prosperity and comfort do on the industry, the fortitude, the loyalty of his people. So it is through all ranks and orders of society—all are deeply affected by the conduct of those around them.

In the domestic circle, how impossible is it for the husband or wife, the parent or child, to be happy, if those with whom he is more immediately connected be perverse and obstinate in an evil way!

Yet all come more or less in contact with unreasonable men; and, however much they may strive to rectify the views, or reform the habits, of such people, they find it altogether beyond their power—they can as easily change the leopard's spots or the Ethiopian's complexion, as they can prevail on people to change those habits which are productive of so much uneasiness to their minds.

Hence, though they form the wisest and most benevolent plans, they cannot carry them into execution, because of the blindness and perverseness of those whose concurrence is necessary for the accomplishment of them.

In like manner, there is often an untowardness in events as well as in men. The seasons will not consult us, nor will the elements obey us. Accidents utterly unforeseen will occur, and cannot be prevented by human foresight. Hence uncertainty attends our best concerted plans, and failure often disappoints our most laborious exertions. But these are "crooked things which no man can make straight"—no human wisdom or power can control them.

We have a large and abundant harvest in prospect; but, behold, storms and tempests, or blasting and mildew, or insects of some kind, destroy the whole crop! We have gathered the harvest into our granaries, and a fire consumes it; or an enemy overruns the land, and devours it.

We have attained the greatest felicity of which we suppose ourselves capable, by a connection the most desirable, or by the acquisition of a first-born son—but how soon does death invade our dwelling, and blast all our promised joys! These are but a few of the evils to which we are exposed in this vain world, and they stamp "vanity and vexation" upon all that we possess.

2. However much we may exert ourselves, we cannot supply that which is defective. "That which is lacking, cannot be numbered."

The rich, the poor, the old, the young, the learned, the unlearned, all without exception, find that there is much lacking to render them completely happy. Of those who possess most of this world's good, it must be said, "In the fullness of their sufficiency they are in straits" [[Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 20.22).]

Solomon is a remarkable example of this. He had formed, if not a wise, yet an honorable connection with Pharaoh's daughter. Not satisfied, he sought happiness in a plurality of wives. Still not having attained happiness, he multiplied his wives and concubines to the number of one thousand—and found himself, after all, as far from happiness as ever. Every other thing which he thought could contribute to his happiness he sought with insatiable avidity. But, after he had attained all his objects, he found, that "the things which were lacking could not be numbered."

And so shall we find it to the last hour of our lives. We may fancy that this or that will make us happy; but, when we have gained it, we have only followed a shadow that eludes our grasp. The truth is, that God never designed the creature to be a satisfying portion to man. Not even Paradise itself could satisfy Adam—no, nor could the partner which he gave him. He must taste the forbidden fruit. He could not be content without an accession of wisdom, which God did not ever intend him to possess. Thus, even in man's state of innocence, nothing but God could satisfy his soul. Nor can anything, short of God himself, ever be a satisfying portion to any child of man.

APPLICATION

1. Set not your affections on things below.

How happy would it be for us, if we could be content to receive the foregoing truths on the testimony of Solomon, instead of determining to learn them by our own experience! How much vexation and misery should we avoid! But, in spite of the united acknowledgments of all who have gone before us, we still think that we shall find something besides God to make us happy. This however we cannot do, even though we should possess all that Solomon ever enjoyed. We may continue our pursuit as long as we will; but we must come at last to the same conclusion as he, and give the same testimony as to the result of our experience.

Be persuaded, brethren, to credit the Divine testimony, and to spare yourselves all the pain and disappointment which, you must otherwise encounter. We mean not that you should renounce the pursuit of earthly things; for you cannot do that without abandoning the duties which you owe to your families and to society at large. But the expectation of happiness from them you may, and must, renounce. You must never forget:

that the creature without God is nothing;

and that happiness is to be found in God alone.

2. Seek the Lord Jesus Christ with your whole hearts.

He is a portion in which you will never find any lack. In him is a fullness sufficient to fill all the capacities, and satisfy all the desires of the whole universe. Millions and millions of immortal souls may go to that fountain, and never diminish his exhaustless store! To the possession of him, no disappointment can attach; nor from the enjoyment of him, can any vexation ensue. In him all "crooked things are made straight." Where he is, no want can possibly exist.

If you ask of the creature . . .  
to heal the wounds of sin,  
to give peace to a guilty conscience,  
to subdue in us our corruptions, or  
to cheer us with hopes of immortality  
—it cannot do any one of these things. No, not even for the body can the creature do anything to heal its sickness, to assuage its anguish, or to prolong its existence. But the Lord Jesus Christ can do everything, both for the body and the soul, both for time and for eternity!

Seek him, then, beloved! Seek him with your whole hearts. In seeking him, your exertions cannot be too earnest, nor can your expectations be too enlarged. If he gives you his flesh to eat, and his blood to drink—you will never hunger, never thirst again, either in this world or in the world to come. Only be able to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His"—and then all in Heaven as in earth, is yours. According as it is written, "All things are yours—and you are in Christ's—and Christ is God's."

The Emptiness of Worldly Mirth

**[Ecclesiastes 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 2.2)**, "I said of laughter: It is mad!

And of mirth: What does it accomplish?"

Who is it that has ventured to speak thus respecting that which constitutes, in the world's estimation, the great happiness of life?

Was he an ignorant man?

Or was he one who from envy decried a thing which he was not able to attain?

Or was he an inexperienced man, who had no just means of forming a judgment?

Or was he an irritated man, who vented thus his spleen against an object that had disappointed him?

Or was he one whose authority in this matter we are at liberty to question!

No! it was the wisest of the human race, who had more ample means of judging than any other man, and had tried the matter to the uttermost. It was Solomon himself, under the influence of the Spirit of God, recording this, not only as the result of his own experience, but as the declaration of Jehovah, by him, for the instruction of the world in all future ages.

He had been left by God to try the vain experiment, whether happiness was to be found in anything but God.

He tried it, first, in the pursuit of knowledge; which, to a person of his enlarged mind, certainly promised most fair to yield him the satisfaction which he sought. But partly from the labor requisite for the attainment of knowledge; partly from discovering how little could be known by people of our finite capacity; partly also from the insufficiency of knowledge to satisfy the innumerable wants of man; and partly from the disgust which had been created in his mind by the insight which his wisdom gave him into the ignorance and folly of the rest of mankind—he left it upon record, as his deliberate judgment, that "in much wisdom is much grief; and that he who increases knowledge, increases sorrow" [[Ecclesiastes 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 1.18).]

He then turned to pleasure, as the most probable source of happiness: "I said in my heart, Go now, I will prove you with mirth: therefore enjoy pleasure." But being equally disappointed in that, he adds, "Behold, this also is vanity."

Then, in the words of my text, he further adds, "I said of laughter: It is mad! And of mirth: What does it accomplish?" [verse 1.]

In discoursing on this subject, I shall,

1. Show what that is which Solomon here pronounces to be "vanity".

It befits us, in considering such weighty declarations us that before us, to attain the most precise and accurate views of the terms employed; neither attenuating the import of them on the one hand, nor exaggerating it on the other.

We are not, then, to understand the text as decrying all cheerfulness. The Christian, above all people upon earth, has reason to be cheerful. True religion in no way tends to destroy the gaiety of the human mind, but only to direct it towards proper objects, and to restrain it within proper bounds. The ways of religion are represented as "ways of pleasantness and peace." "The fruits of the Spirit are, love, joy, peace, etc." all of which suppose a measure of cheerfulness, and the innocence of that cheerfulness, when arising from a fitting source, and kept within the limits of sobriety and sound wisdom.

Doubtless that tumultuous kind of joy which is generally denominated mirth, and which vents itself in immoderate laughter, is altogether vain and bad. But a tranquility of mind, exercising itself in a way of brotherly love and of cheerful benevolence, can never be censured as unprofitable, much less can it be condemned as verging towards foolishness.

Neither, on the other hand, are we to restrict the text to licentious and profane mirth. That needed not to be stigmatized in so peculiar a manner, because the fully of such mirth carries its own evidence along with it. We need only to see it in others, and if we ourselves are not partakers of it, we shall not hesitate to characterize it by some opprobrious or contemptuous name. We need neither the wisdom of Solomon, nor his experience, to pass upon it the judgment it deserves.

The conduct reprobated in our text is, the seeking of our happiness in carnal mirth. Solomon particularly specifies this: "I said in my heart. Go now, I will prove you with mirth." I will see whether that will afford me the happiness which I am in pursuit of. And we may suppose, that, in the prosecution of this object, he summoned around him all that was mirthful and lively in his court, and all that could contribute towards the attainment of it.

We may take a survey of the state of society in what may be called the fashionable world, and see how the votaries of pleasure spend their time. They go from one vanity to another, hoping that in a succession of amusements they shall find a satisfaction which nothing else can impart. Plays, balls, concerts, parties, the pleasures of the theater, of the race-course, of the card-table—form a certain round of employment, which those who travel in it expect to find productive of happiness, of such happiness at least as they affect. And this, I conceive, is what Solomon intended particularly to reprobate as fully and madness.

Of course, we must include also in the same description the more vulgar amusements to which the lower classes resort. All, according to their taste, or the means afforded them for enjoyment, while they pursue the same object—are obnoxious to the same censure. The degree of refinement which may be in their pursuits makes no difference in this matter. Whatever it be which calls forth their mirth and laughter, it is equally unprofitable and equally foolish. So Solomon judged.

We now proceed—

2. To confirm Solomon's testimony.

Let us take a candid view of this matter—let us consider pleasure in its true light—let us consider its aspect on us:

1. As MEN. As men, we possess faculties of a very high order, which we ought to cultivate, and which, when duly improved, exalt and dignify our nature.

But behold the votaries of pleasure; how low do they sink themselves by the depravity of their taste, and the emptiness of their pleasures! A man devoid of wisdom may abound in mirth and laughter, as well as a cultivated man. There will be found very little difference in their feelings; except, as the more enlarged men's capacities are for higher objects, the keener sense will they have of the emptiness of their vain pursuits. In truth, we may appeal even to themselves in confirmation of what Solomon has said; for there are no people more convinced of the unsatisfying nature of such pursuits, than those who follow them with the greatest avidity.

But let Scripture speak: "She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives" [[1 Timothy 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 5.6).] It is the fool alone that can say, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry" [[Luke 12:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 12.19).]

2. As SINNERS. As sinners we have a great work to do; even to call to mind, and to mourn over, the sins of our whole lives, and to seek reconciliation with our offended God. The time, too, which is afforded us for this is very short and very uncertain. And, oh! what an outcome awaits our present exertions: even Heaven with all its glory—or Hell with all its inconceivable and everlasting terrors! Have people so circumstanced, any time for mirth, or any disposition to waste their precious hours in foolishness? Is it not much more suitable to them to be engaged according to the direction of James, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" [[James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.9-10).]

3. As the REDEEMED of the Lord.

What redeemed soul can contemplate the price paid for his redemption, and laugh? Go, my brother, to Gethsemane, and see your Savior bathed in a bloody sweat. Go to Calvary, and behold him stretched upon the cruel cross. Hear his heart-rending cry, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" See the sun himself veiling his face in darkness, and the Lord of glory bowing his head in death. And then tell me, whether you feel much disposition for mirth and laughter—or whether such a state of mind would befit you?

Methinks, I need add no more. Your own consciences will attest the justice of Solomon's remarks. But if there be an advocate for mirth yet unconvinced, then I put it to him to answer that significant question in my text, "What does it accomplish?"

APPLICATION

1. Are any disposed to complain that I make religion gloomy?

Remember, it is of carnal mirth that I have spoken; and of that, not in its occasional sallies, from a buoyancy of spirit, and in combination with love-but of its being regarded as a source of happiness, and of its constituting, as it were, a portion of our daily employment. And if I wrest this carnal mirth from you, do I leave you a prey to melancholy? Go to true religion, and see whether that does not furnish you with mirth and laughter of a purer kind—with mirth that is not unprofitable, with laughter that is not mad. The very end of the Gospel is, to "give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." If you believe in Christ, it is not merely your privilege, but your duty to rejoice in him, yes, to "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

If the Church, on account of temporal deliverances, could say, "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing" [[Psalm 126:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 126.1-2)] then much more may you rejoice, on account of the salvation which has been given to you. Only, therefore, let the grounds of your joy be right, and we consent that "your mourning be turned into dancing, and that to the last hour of your lives you put off your sackcloth and gird yourself with gladness" [[Psalm 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 30.11).] Instead of pronouncing such mirth madness, we will declare it to be your truest wisdom.

2. Are there any among you who accord with Solomon?

Remember, then, to seek those as your associates who are like-minded with you in this respect. Affect not the company of those who delight in carnal laughter and mirth; for they will only draw you from God, and rob you of the happiness which you might otherwise enjoy. If they appear happy, remember that "their mirth is like the crackling of thorns under a pot" [[Ecclesiastes 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.6).] It may make a blaze for a moment, but it soon expires in disappointment and melancholy.

Be careful, too, to live near to God, and in sweet communion with your Lord and Savior; for if you draw back from God in secret, you will, in respect of happiness, be in a worse condition than the world themselves. For while you deny yourselves the pleasure which you might have in carnal things, you will have no real pleasure in spiritual exercises. But be true to your principles, and you never need envy the poor worldlings their vain enjoyments. They drink of a polluted cistern, that contains nothing but what is insipid and injurious, and will prove fatal to their souls. You draw from the fountain of living waters, which whoever drinks of, shall live forever.

The Excellence of Wisdom

**[Ecclesiastes 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 2.13)**, "Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness."

The more exact is our scrutiny into the things of this world, the more decided will be our judgment respecting them. If people ever think highly of the vanities of this poor world, it is because they have never set down seriously to examine their true character, or labored to form a right estimate respecting them. Solomon possessed means of ascertaining their real value beyond any other person that ever existed; for, possessing wisdom above any other man, he had a greater capacity to extract all the sweetness that was in them. And, being a monarch, he could command all things through the whole range of nature, to present to him their tribute of gratification according to their respective abilities.

But, after a minute examination of everything, he was constrained to give this, at last, as the result of his experience: "Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness."

Now this, I conceive, refers in part to human wisdom, as occupied in intellectual pursuits. For it is certain, that among objects that relate only to this present life, there is nothing to be compared with this. Intellect is that which distinguishes man from the brute creation; and the enlargement of it with arts and sciences is that which elevates man above his fellows. The cultivation of it is more suited to the dignity of man than the gratification of his sensual appetites; in all of which the beasts have as large a capacity of enjoyment as he.

The pleasures arising from intellectual pursuits are also less apt to cloy, and will endure, when a taste for sensual enjoyments has passed away. Intellectual pursuits will gratify, also, when it is not the object of immediate pursuit; because it will supply in reflection much of what it conferred in the actual acquisition. It is also of great use, and qualifies a man for conferring extensive benefits on the world; at the same time that it opens to him a thousand channels of pleasure which are utterly unknown to the unfurnished mind.

A person habituated only to bodily exertion has no conception what a fund of satisfaction the exercises of the mind supply, or what delight attaches to the investigation of science and the discovery of truth. Sensual indulgences, indeed, strike more strongly upon the senses; and therefore, to a carnal mind, seem to furnish a greater measure of delight. But the more eagerly they are sought, the less pleasure they afford; and they bring with them, for the most part, many painful consequences.

So that, in comparison of intellectual pursuits, they deserve the name of "folly;" while the prosecution of the other may properly be called "wisdom." Yet it must be confessed, that there is much truth in that observation of Solomon, "In much wisdom is much grief; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow [[Ecclesiastes 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 1.18).] For "much study is undoubtedly a weariness to the flesh [[Ecclesiastes 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 12.12)] and it is often followed by painful disappointment, I conceive, therefore, that we are by no means to limit the import of our text to human wisdom; but must extend it to that which is divine wisdom; in reference to which we may say, without any limitation or exception, "It excels folly, as far as light excels darkness."

Of this spiritual wisdom, I will now proceed to speak; and its transcendent excellence I will point out in reference to,

I. The proper character of spiritual wisdom.

"Wisdom" is another word for piety.

Piety in the Scriptures is frequently called by this name. Job says, "The fear of the Lord that is wisdom [[Job 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 28.28).] And Moses prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom [[Psalm 90:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 90.12).]

But, not to rest in a mere general definition of the term, I shall consider it as embracing these two points:

1. the receiving of the Gospel, as sinners;

2. the adorning of it, as saints.

The very first part of wisdom is to receive the Gospel of salvation into our hearts. We all need it; nor can any human being be saved without it; and God offers to us all the blessings of it, freely, without money and without price. Were we under a sentence of death from a human tribunal, and were offered mercy by the Prince, it would be accounted wisdom to accept the offer, and folly to reject it. How much more is it our wisdom to accept a deliverance from eternal death, together with all the glory and felicity of Heaven! This must commend itself to every man who reflects but for a moment; and to despise these offered benefits must, of necessity, be regarded as folly, bordering upon madness!

The next part of wisdom must be, to adorn that Gospel by a holy life and conduct; since it cannot otherwise be ultimately of any avail for our acceptance with God. The very intent of the Gospel is to transform man into the Divine image, and thereby to prepare him for the enjoyment of his God. And if this be not attained, Heaven itself would be no place of happiness to him. Indeed, if a man professes to embrace the Gospel, and yet continue to walk unworthy of it, he dishonors God far more than he could do while he made no such profession; for he "tramples under foot the Son of God, and counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and does despite unto the Spirit of Grace" [[Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.29).] Yes, he crucifies the Son of God afresh, and puts him to an open shame [[Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.6).] I think, therefore, that the pursuit of holiness in all its branches, with an uniform endeavor to glorify our God, must commend itself to every considerate mind, as true "wisdom."

All this far excels "folly".

I will not go into particulars to characterize "folly"; it shall suffice to take the most lenient view of it that can be imagined. I will comprehend under it no positive vice, nothing that can render it odious in the eyes of men. I will take it only in a negative view, as importing a neglect of the two foregoing dictates of sound wisdom. And now I will ask, Who does not see the superiority of wisdom—and that "it excels folly as far as light excels darkness?"

"Darkness" has nothing whatever to commend it—it is utterly destitute of every good quality. Whereas "light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun" [[Ecclesiastes 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 11.7).] And precisely thus does piety approve itself to every beholder; while a neglect of God presents nothing but gloom, the end of which no human imagination can reach.

II. The influence of spiritual wisdom on this present life.

There is not a moment of our lives over which it does not cast a benignant influence.

In bringing us to the foot of the Cross, spiritual wisdom is the means of effecting our reconciliation with, God, and of filling the soul with peace and joy. In stirring us up to mortify our corruptions, spiritual wisdom keeps us from innumerable snares to which others are exposed, and from troubles in which others are involved.

This seems to have been particularly in Solomon's mind, when he penned the words of my text; for he adds immediately, "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walks in darkness" [verse 14.]

Spiritual wisdom conduces also most essentially to the benefit of all around us. It tends to check vice and wickedness in the world, and to promote virtue in every possible way. It calls forth all the acts and offices of love, both in the professor himself, and in all who come within the sphere of its influence. Spiritual wisdom greatly honors God too, and tends to the advancement of his kingdom upon earth. There is no end to the benefits of true wisdom; for, so far as it prevails and operates, it repairs the ruins of the Fall; and changes this wretched, miserable world into a very Paradise.

In this respect, how widely different is "folly!"

See the world as it is, and then you will see what "folly" has done. Enter into the bosoms of men, and see how full they are of all hateful tempers and dispositions, and how utterly destitute of everything like solid peace. See what troubles it has introduced into society, insomuch that there is scarcely to be found a single family which is not more or less torn with disputes and disagreements. See what evils it diffuses on every side—and then say in what light it appears as compared with wisdom. I boldly ask, Does not wisdom excel it "as far as light excels darkness?" Darkness is suited to nothing but the deeds of darkness, and the gory excursions of beasts of prey. Whereas light administers to the welfare of all, and enables every member of society to execute his functions for the good of the whole. So that in this respect, also, the comparison is fitly made.

But let us trace "wisdom" yet further,

III. The effects of spiritual wisdom upon the eternal world.

It is here that the great excellence of wisdom will be chiefly found. If there were no future state, folly might, with some semblance of truth, compete with wisdom, because its gratifications are so strong to the organs of sense. But, when we view the aspect of wisdom upon eternity, and reflect that every one of its dictates has a direct tendency to fit the soul for Heaven and to augment its eternal bliss; while the operations of folly have a directly opposite bearing—all competition between them vanishes; since Heaven and Hell might as well bear a comparison as they.

In truth, the light of Heaven and its glory afford a just illustration of the one; while "the blackness of darkness" in the regions of Hell gives but too just a portrait of the other. The one brings us to the divine image; the other reduces us to the likeness of beasts and devils. The one ensures to us the everlasting fruition of our God; the other entails upon us his everlasting displeasure. In requiring you, therefore, to receive the declaration of my text, that "Wisdom excels folly as far as light excels darkness," I do nothing but what every conscience must assent to, and every judgment approve.

Permit me, then, in conclusion to ask:

1. What is the **judgment**you have already formed?

I know that in theory you will all accede to this statement. But what has been your practical judgment? If we look at your lives, what will they attest to have been your views of this subject? Has wisdom there shone, and folly been put to shame? Have you really been living with a view to the eternal world, embracing the Gospel thankfully as sinners, and adorning it as saints. I ask not what "you have said" with your lips, but what "you have said" in your lives. It is not by your professions, but by your practice, that God will judge you; and therefore it is by that standard that you must judge yourselves.

2. What is the **conduct**you intend hereafter to pursue?

The world, I acknowledge, gives its voice in direct opposition to the foregoing statement. It represents religion as folly, and the prosecution of carnal enjoyments as wisdom. But its "calling good evil, and evil good," will not change their respective natures. Nor, if the whole world should unite in putting darkness for light, or light for darkness, will either of them lose its own qualities, and assume those of the other. "Sweet" will be sweet, and "bitter" will be bitter, whether men will believe it or not [[Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.20).]

Will you then go contrary to the convictions of your own minds, in compliment to an ungodly world? Or will you, for fear of offending them, sacrifice the interests of your immortal souls? I call upon you to seek "wisdom, which is more to be chosen than fine gold" [[Proverbs 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 16.16).] Let your whole life declare its value, and be a standing testimony against the folly of the ungodly. So shall you have in this world a sweet experience of my text, and enjoy an ample confirmation of it in the world above.

The Different Portions of the Righteous and Wicked

**[Ecclesiastes 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 2.26)**, "God gives to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he gives travail."

In relation to earthly things, men run into two opposite extremes: some seeking their happiness altogether in the enjoyment of them; and others denying themselves the proper and legitimate use of them, in order that they may amass wealth for some future possessor. But both of these classes are unwise—the former, in that they look for that in the creature which is not to be found in it; and the latter, in that, without any adequate reason, they deprive themselves of comforts which God has designed them to enjoy.

A temperate use of the good things of this life is nowhere forbidden. On the contrary, "there is," as Solomon informs us, "nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor." Doubtless this concession must be taken with certain restrictions; for we are not to spend all our substance on ourselves, but to be doing good with it to others. Nor are we to suppose that our life consists in the abundance of the things that we possess, but to be seeking our happiness in God. That which alone will impart solid happiness, is true religion; for to the good man God gives what shall render him truly blessed; namely, "wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he gives travail."

From these words I shall take occasion to show you,

I. The different portions of the righteous and the wicked.

The world may be divided into two denominations—the righteous and the wicked.

"To the righteous, God gives wisdom, and knowledge, and joy."

As to carnal wisdom, I am not sure that the wicked have not in general the advantage; as it is said, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" [[Luke 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 16.18).] But the godly have a discernment of earthly things, or, as my text expresses it, a "wisdom and knowledge" in relation to them, which no ungodly man has ever attained.

The godly see the true use of worldly things; and how they may be rendered conducive to the honor of God, and the good of the soul. As instruments for advancing the welfare of mankind, they may be desired and employed to good effect; and in this mode of using them God will confer real and abiding "joy." Even the portion of them which is consumed upon ourselves will be relished with a richer zest; for "God has given us all things richly to enjoy." The thought of honoring God with them, and benefitting mankind, will give to them a kind of sanctified enjoyment, of such as was received from the harvest of which the first-fruits had been duly consecrated to the Lord [[Luke 11:41](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 11.41).]

The good man does not merely enjoy the things themselves—he enjoys God in them; and, in so doing, has the "testimony of his own conscience that he pleases God." Nor is he unconscious that he is laying up treasure in Heaven, even "bags which never wear out, and a treasure which never fails [[Luke 12:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 12.33-34), [1 Timothy 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.19).]

"To the sinner," on the other hand, "he gives travail".

A man who neglects his God, can find no happiness in earthly things. In his pursuit of them, he is filled with care, which robs him of all real comfort [See verse 22, 23.] In his enjoyment of them, they prove empty and cloying, "his very laughter being only as the crackling of thorns under a pot." And, his mind being alienated from God, he has no source of peace from religion. Truly "the way of transgressors is hard" [[Proverbs 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 13.15)] or rather I must say, as the Scripture does, "Destruction and misery are in their ways [[Romans 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.16-17).] Remarkable is that declaration of Zophar, "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/esv/Job 20.22).] And if this be their state in the midst of life and health—then what must it be in a time of sickness and death? Most true is that declaration of Solomon: "What profit has he, who has labored for the wind? All his days he eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness" [[Ecclesiastes 5:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 5.16-17).]

Thus, while the blessing of the Lord is upon the righteous, seeing that, whatever he bestow, "he adds no sorrow with it" [[Proverbs 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 10.22)] he mixes gall and wormwood with the sinner's cup, and infuses a curse into his choicest blessings!

Let us now notice,

II. The hand of God, as displayed in the different portions of the righteous and the wicked.

It is said in relation to both the righteous and the wicked, that "God gives to them" their respective portions: both the one and the other are "from the hand of God [verse 24.] In them we see,

1. The true nature of God's moral government—

Even now is there far more of equity in the dispensations of God than a superficial observer would imagine. Doubtless there is a great difference in the states of different men; but the rich and great have troubles of which the poor and destitute have very little conception. The very state of mind fostered by their distinctions is by no means favorable to their happiness; and the habits of the poor so inure them to privations, that they feel much less trouble from them than one would imagine. But let piety enter into any soul; and we hesitate not to declare, that though he were a Lazarus at the Rich Man's gate, he were far happier than the man of opulence by whose crumbs he was fed. Peace of mind, arising from a sense of reconciliation with God, and a hope of final acceptance with him, is sufficient to weigh down all that an ungodly man ever did or could, possess. And "the poorest man, if rich in faith and an heir of God's kingdom," is more to be envied than the greatest monarch upon earth, who possesses not real piety.

But with equity, goodness also is observable in all the dispensations of Providence. That God is good to the great and opulent, will be readily acknowledged; but God is so to the sinner, whom he leaves to experience the most painful disappointments. If a mother embitters to her child the breast on which he would fondly live, it is that he may learn to affect a more substantial diet. Just so, if God, after all the labor which men put forth to render the creature a source of comfort, causes it to become to them only as "a broken cistern that can hold no water," it is only that they may the more readily turn to him, and seek him, as "the fountain of living waters."

2. The certain outcome of God's future judgment—

Is there, even in this world, a difference is put between him who serves God, and him who serves him not? Much more shall that be found in the judgment day which is especially set apart for the display of God's righteous judgments. The Prophet Isaiah, as God's herald, received this awful commission: "Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with him—for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. But woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him—for the reward of his deeds shall be given him [[Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 3.10-11).]

For the righteous is reserved a state of unutterable joy; but for the wicked, a state of utter exclusion from the realms of bliss, "in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone," "where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." If the present inequalities of his dispensations lead us to expect this, much more does that previous distribution of good and evil which is even now accorded to men in correspondence with their moral habits. What is at this moment felt in the minds of the different characters, may well teach us what to expect in the day of judgment: even a separation of the righteous and the wicked; the one to everlasting fire; and the other to everlasting life, and blessedness, and glory.

Let me now, from this subject, RECOMMEND,

1. Religion in general—

It is this which makes the chief difference between different men. The prince on his throne, and the beggar on the dunghill, are but little apart in comparison of "the saint" and "the sinner." Piety sets men asunder, as far as light from darkness, Heaven from Hell. Let those then among you, who would he happy either here or hereafter, give yourselves up to God, and approve yourselves to him. Only believe and repent" and happiness will be yours, both in time and in eternity.

2. A due improvement of all that you possess—

To squander your possessions away in self-indulgence, or to hoard them for some future possessor, will be alike foolish and vain. Neither of these modes of employing wealth can ever make you happy. The serving of God, and the benefitting of your fellow-creatures, will, on the contrary, bring peace and joy into the soul: for "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever." Not that any liberality of yours can ever form a ground of hope before God in a way of merit—all that you have is the Lord's and it is only of his own that you give him. But if you are seeking righteousness and salvation by Christ alone, then will your works be accepted for Christ's sake: and whatever you dispose of for the advancement of his glory, he will acknowledge it as "lent to him, and he will repay you." The talents that are improved for him, shall receive, in due proportion, a recompense at his hands.

Duty of Paying Our Vows

**[Ecclesiastes 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 5.4-5)**, "When you vow a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he has no pleasure in fools; pay that which you have vowed. Better is it that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay."

The offering of vows was extremely common under the Mosaic dispensation; and many laws were instituted in relation to them. By them people bound themselves to the performance of certain things which were not specifically appointed of God. Some were conditional, and depended on some mercy which should be previously bestowed by God [[Genesis 28:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 28.20-22). [1 Samuel 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Sam 1.11).] Others were absolute, and to be performed by the people at all events. Respecting vows made by people who were under the government of others, especial provision was made, under what circumstances, and to what extent, they should be binding [[Numbers 30:3-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 30.3-15).] In cases where the vows themselves were not lawful, the person sinned, whether he performed them or not [verse 6.]; and in some cases at least, the violation of them was less criminal than the observance [[Matthew 14:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 14.6-10). [Acts 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 23.12).] But where they were not in themselves contrary to any command of God, there they were to be punctually fulfilled, and without delay.

We propose, on the present occasion, to consider the duties which are binding upon us independently of any vows which we may make respecting them.

They arise from our very relation to God as his creatures, and more especially as his redeemed people. The potter is undoubtedly entitled to the use of the vessels which his own hands have formed. Even if our services were ever so painful, we should have no right to complain: "the thing formed could not, under any circumstances, presume to say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?" [[Romans 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 9.20).] But, as we have before observed, the whole of what we have taken upon ourselves is a truly reasonable service; and therefore it would be the height of impiety to hesitate for a moment in giving up ourselves unreservedly to God.

But God has redeemed us also, and that too by the blood of his only dear Son, "We are not our own; we are bought with a price; and therefore we are bound from this consideration also to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." It is not optional with us, whether we will surrender to him what he has so dearly purchased. We cannot withhold it; whether we make any vow respecting it, or not, we are equally bound to employ all our faculties for God.

To bind ourselves to these things by solemn vows is a truly and properly evangelical duty.

Some would imagine this to be a legal act—and if we were to engage in it with a view to establish a righteousness of our own, or with an idea of performing our duties in our own strength, it would then indeed be legal. But if, in humble dependence on divine aid, we devote ourselves to God, it is no other act than that which God himself has specified as characterizing his people under the Gospel dispensation [[Isaiah 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 19.21).] The very manner in which this act shall be performed is also specified; and it is particularly foretold, that all who are duly influenced by Gospel principles shall animate one another to the performance of it [[Jeremiah 50:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 50.4-5).]

Such then are the vows which we have made: they are comprehensive indeed, but highly reasonable, and relating only to things which are in themselves necessary.

We now proceed to notice the importance of performing our vows.

But how shall this be painted in any adequate terms? In it is bound up,

1. Our comfort in LIFE—

Many foolishly imagine that a life devoted unto God must be one continued scene of melancholy. But is not the very reverse declared in Scripture? "The work of righteousness is peace," says the prophet;, and "the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever." Yes, "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." We will venture to appeal to the consciences of all, whether even the greatest despisers of religion do not think that truly pious people are happier than they? In the very nature of things it must be, that those who are delivered from the tyranny of their lusts are happier than those who are yet slaves of sin and Satan. Their minds must be more tranquil, and their consciences more serene.

But if we take into the account, that God "will manifest himself to his faithful servants as he does not unto the world," and "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and "fill them with a peace that passes understanding, and joy that is unspeakable," we can have no doubt but that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward." In proof of this, we need only see with what delight David contemplated the paying of his vows to God [[Psalm 22:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 22.25); [Psalm 66:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 66.13-14).] The more we resemble him in the ardor of his piety, the more shall we resemble him also in the sublimity of his joys.

2. Our hope in DEATH—

What must be the prospects of an ungodly man in his dying hour? When he looks back upon all his duties neglected, and his eternal interests sacrificed to the things of time and sense—what must he think of the state to which he is hastening? He may try to comfort himself with his own vain delusions; but he will feel a secret consciousness that he is building on the sand. Hence it is, that those who will not give themselves up to God, are so averse to hear of death and judgment. They know that, if the Scriptures are true, and God is such a God as he is there represented, then they have nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation. It is the godly alone who can feel composed and happy in the near approach of death. They, when the time of their departure is at hand, can look forward with joy to "that crown of glory which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to them." "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

3. Our welfare in ETERNITY—

"God will surely put a difference between those who served him here, and those who served him not." Hear what Solomon says to us in the text: "When you vow a vow unto God, defer not to pay it—for God has no pleasure in fools." No indeed; God can have no pleasure in those who never delighted themselves in him. How is it possible that he should receive to his bosom those who spent their whole lives in rebellion against him? He shows his abhorrence of them by the very name whereby he designates them in the words before us—He calls them "fools," and will leave them to reap the bitter fruits of their folly.

We may see how indignant God was against Zedekiah for violating a covenant whereby he had engaged to hold the kingdom of Judah as tributary to the king of Babylon [[Ezekiel 17:11-21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 17.11-21).] What indignation then must He feel against those who have violated all their engagements with him! If the neglect of vows made by compulsion to an oppressive enemy be so criminal—then what must be the neglect of vows voluntarily made to the Most High God! But we need not collect this in a way of inference; for God himself has expressly told us, that we must pay our vows to him; that we must do it without delay; that if we defer to pay them, it will be imputed to us as a most heinous sin; and that he will surely require it at our hands [[Deuteronomy 23:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 23.21-23).]

The House of Mourning to Be Preferred

**[Ecclesiastes 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.4)**, "The day of death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting."

In order to learn what loss we have sustained in our intellectual powers through the introduction of sin into the world, it is not necessary for us to investigate the mysteries of our holy religion, which exceed the comprehension of any finite intelligence. We need only look to the ethics that are revealed to us in God's blessed word; and we shall see, even in them, that darkness has veiled the human mind, and there is an utter contrariety between the sentiments of fallen man and the plainest declarations of Almighty God.

Take, for instance, the declarations which precede my text: "The day of death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting" and "sorrow is better than laughter." Will anyone say that these aphorisms are agreeable to the general apprehension of mankind? Is there not, on the contrary, something in them extremely paradoxical, and, at first sight, almost absurd? Yet are these sentiments unquestionably true, as are those also which my text records: "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."

It shall be my endeavor,

I. To confirm these different positions—

It is not Solomon's intention to say that a wise man can never go to the house of mirth, any more than that a fool may not sometimes go to the house of mourning. The question is not, To which of the places these different characters may occasionally go; but, To which of them their "hearts" are inclined. Let us then inquire,

1. Where is the heart of the wise?

We hesitate not to say that a man who is taught of God, and made wise unto salvation, has "his heart in the house of mourning;" and that for the following reasons:

First, his heart is in the house of mourning, because he there learns the most invaluable lessons. There he sees what the lot of fallen man is, "He is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." He sees, also, what may speedily become his own lot, for "he knows not what a day or an hour may bring forth." He sees how vain and empty are all earthly things; in that not all the wealth or honor that ever was possessed by man can either avert calamity, or assuage the pain arising from it. Above all, he sees the excellence of true religion, which can apply a balm to every wound, and turn tribulation itself into an occasion for joy! [[Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.3).]

Next, his heart is in the house of mourning, because there he has scope for the exercise of the holiest feelings of his soul. There is compassion excited towards his suffering fellow-creature, and sympathy with him in his afflictions. True, these feelings are in some respects painful: but there is in them something so exquisite and refined, that they afford, if I may so speak, the sublimest pleasure of which the human mind is capable. These feelings assimilate us, in a very eminent degree, to our God and Savior, who "is touched with the feeling of our infirmities" [[Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.15)]," and "in all our afflictions is himself afflicted" [[Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.9).]

Nor can the sufferings of a fellow-creature be seen without exciting in our bosoms thanksgivings to God, who has been pleased to withhold his chastening rod from us, and to make us his honored instruments of imparting comfort to our afflicted brethren. This also, though not attended with any ebullition of joy, is a very sublime and delightful feeling; not unlike to that of Joseph, when his affections yearned for his brother Benjamin, and a prospect was opened to him of making his own advancement an occasion of benefit to his whole family: "He made haste, and sought where to weep; and entered into his chamber, and wept there" [[Genesis 43:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 43.29-30).]

A still further reason why his heart is in the house of mourning is, that there he meets, and enjoys, and honors God. God has said, that "he meets those who rejoice in working righteousness" [[Isaiah 64:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 64.5).] And, truly, he fulfills this word in a more especial manner to those who abound in works of mercy, because he considers himself as the object of that love, wherever it is exercised, and in whatever it is employed [[Matthew 25:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.35-36).]

I will appeal those who have frequented the house of mourning, whether they have not often found God more present with them there, than even in their own chamber. In truth, God is honored there with more than common tributes of acknowledgment. There he is referred to as the All-wise Disposer of all events, and as the gracious Father who corrects only in love and for his people's good. There, too, he is set forth in all his glorious perfections, and especially in all the wonders of redeeming love. There he is invariably set forth as the author of the very good which is at that hour dispensed to the troubled soul; so that the creature, his instrument, is overlooked, and he alone is glorified.

Say then, brethren, whether here is not ample reason for the preference shown to "the house of mourning," and whether he is not truly wise, whose heart has dictated such a choice as this?

In contrast with this, we ask,

2. Where is the heart of the fool?

It is "in the house of mirth." And why?

One reason is that there he is enabled to forget himself. Men do not like to reflect upon their own state before God, and they account anything desirable which can dispel unwelcome thoughts, and furnish a pleasing occupation for their minds. Hence it is that all places of amusement are so thronged.

Hence it is that even the house of God is made to administer to our satisfaction; the irksomeness of prayer being rendered tolerable by the fascinations of music, and the charms of eloquence. Hence, too, everyone who can devise a new expedient for preventing time from hanging heavy on our hands, will be sure to gain our patronage, and be welcomed and rewarded as a public benefactor.

Another reason is, that the fool there finds what is most gratifying to his corrupt taste. One has an appetite for conviviality and licentiousness. Another desires the more decent gratifications of music, and dancing, and such like. Another, more elevated in the scale of being, desires rather the intellectual and refined pleasures of science and philosophy. But each is an epicure in his way; and, though their pursuits are different, each in his own line is as insatiable as the other. He is never weary of his favorite pursuit. He desires to be amused; and makes the gratification of his own particular taste the end of all his studies and pursuits. In a word, he lives only to have his own taste gratified, and to administer to the gratification of those who are like-minded with himself. Wherever he can attain these ends, there his heart is, and there his most select abode.

But there is yet another reason for his preference of "the house of mirth"—he finds himself countenanced in his neglect of God. Every man has a secret consciousness that he ought to seek after God in the first place, and to postpone every other duty and enjoyment to that. But when he sees others as remiss in this duty as himself, he comforts himself with the thought that he is no worse than others. He has the hope that God will never mark with his displeasure what is so generally regarded as innocent and inoffensive.

At all events, he finds nothing to reproach him there. "In a house of mourning" he would see many things repugnant to his desires and habits. For even a fool there puts on, for the time, the semblance of wisdom; and assents to the truth, that the care of the soul is the one thing needful. But "in the house of mirth" all that he either hears or sees bids him to be of good courage, and not to question for a moment the approbation of his Judge.

I think that the positions in my text are now made sufficiently clear; so that we may with propriety proceed,

II. To point out their bearing on the Christian's life and conduct—

These principles may doubtless he pressed too far, and they are then carried to excess, when they are regarded as prohibiting all friendly fellowship with the ungodly world; for our blessed Savior himself honored with his company a wedding feast, and a feast, too, that was provided for him by an ignorant and unhumbled Pharisee. But, taking these different positions with such a latitude as both reason and Scripture will fairly admit, the least that we should learn from them is,

1. We should learn to be on our guard against acquiescing too easily in popular opinions—

From the positions which we have just considered, the carnal mind revolts. Yet, not only are these positions confirmed by our blessed Lord, but they are expressed by him in for stronger terms than by Solomon himself. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who mourn; blessed are those who weep now; blessed are you when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. But woe unto you who are rich; woe unto you who are full; woe unto you who laugh now; woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you."

It is obvious that light and darkness are scarcely more opposite than these declarations are to the sentiments and habits of the world at large. But are we therefore to question the truth of them, or to refuse submission to them? No, we are to regard the Scriptures as the only authorized standard of opinion; and to them must our sentiments be conformed. Even if the whole world combines to reprobate what the Scriptures enjoin, we must not be deterred from following what God prescribes; but must boldly say, "Let God be true, but every man a liar" [[Romans 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.4).]

2. We should learn to take **eternity**into our estimate of present things—

In the passage just cited from the Sermon on the Mount, we see that every declaration of our blessed Lord is founded on the aspect which our present state has upon the eternal world. And I would ask, What would the Rich Man and Lazarus now think of the condition in which they were each placed when in this lower world? Would carnal mirth be commended by the one, or temporal distress be deprecated by the other, in such terms as the spectators of their widely different condition were once accustomed to use respecting them? Methinks the enjoyments and sufferings of time would be deemed by them scarcely worthy of a thought; and eternity would swallow up every other consideration.

And so it will be with us, before long. Indeed, even at this present moment, every man's conscience bears witness to this truth, however in the habits of his life he may contradict it. I cannot therefore but entreat all to consider what will be their views of present things, when they shall have left this transient scene; and to regulate their judgment now by what they believe to be the uniform tenor of God's word, and the full conviction of every creature, whether in Heaven or in Hell.

3. We should learn to examine well the tendencies and inclinations of our hearts—

In the prospect of death and judgment, men may be led to adopt sentiments which they do not cordially approve, and to follow a conduct in which they have no delight. I ask not. then, what you either say or do under such circumstances. I ask not whether you put a force upon your inclinations, abstaining from indulgences in which you would be glad to revel, and performing services from which you would gladly be excused: I ask, What are the pursuits which your heart affects? What is your real and predominant taste? and what is the employment in which you chiefly delight? I need not say what would be the taste of an angel, if he were sent to sojourn here: nor need I tell you what was the taste of our blessed Savior and his holy Apostles: of these things no one of you can entertain a doubt. This, then, I say, Seek now to be, what before long you will wish you had been: seek to be in heart, what you are bound to be in act. It is by the inward dispositions of your souls that you will be judged in the last day. What if, like Doeg. you were "detained before the Lord." if yet you had no pleasure in the service of your God? Would your worship be pleasing and acceptable to God? No: "your heart must be right with him." if you would either please him here, or be accepted of him hereafter. To every one of you, therefore, I say, Inquire not where your bodies are but where your hearts: "for as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" [[Proverbs 23:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 23.7).],"

4. We should learn to conform ourselves to the suggestions offered in our text—

Let not anyone think them too strong, or that the conduct which they recommend is too self-denying. I have already shown that the same things are spoken by Christ himself; and I must further observe, that the whole tenor of God's blessed word suggests and enjoins the same. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" [[1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 2.15-16).] What is there "in the house of mirth" which is not here proscribed?

Again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom of by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" [[Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.14).] Think at how low a rate the world esteems an object that is crucified—a man in the very article of death upon a cross. Surely, if these and other passages of the same tendency be duly weighed, there will be no difficulty in apprehending the true import of my text, nor any doubt upon our minds, which of the two objects before us should be preferred.

Let this preference, then, be seen in the whole of of our life and conduct. I say not, that we should never go to "the house of mirth," but only that, our heart should not be there; and that, if called there by any peculiar occurrence, we should go, not as those that would be at home there, but as physicians to a hospital, where they desire to do all the good they can, but are glad to come away again, and to breathe a purer atmosphere.

Well do I know that it is not in the power of all to visit the abodes of misery, and to spend their time in administering to the necessities of the poor. But, where these offices can be performed consistently with the duties of our own peculiar sphere, they are most pleasing in the sight of God, and greatly profitable to our own souls. But those who cannot embark to any extent in the office of visiting the afflicted, may yet facilitate the execution of it in others by their liberal contributions. And if, from the peculiarity of our engagements, we are so circumstanced, that we cannot personally frequent "the house of mourning," let us at least show that our hearts are there; and that we have no occupation more congenial with our minds, than to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Contentment Recommended

**[Ecclesiastes 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.10)**, "Do not say: 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions."

In the writings of Solomon we find many maxims, which, if uttered by an uninspired man, would be controverted; but to which, as suggested by inspiration from God, we submit to without gainsaying. That which is delivered in the passage before us does not, at first sight, carry its own evidence along with it. But the more it is investigated, the more will it appear to be a dictate of sound wisdom, and worthy of universal acceptance. That we may derive from it the full benefit which it is calculated to impart, let us consider,

I. What is the inquiry which is here discouraged? "Do not say: 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions."

It is not every comparison of existing circumstances with the past, that is here reprobated—

In many situations we may, with the utmost propriety, institute an inquiry into the reasons of any change which may have taken place.

A man, in relation to his own temporal concerns, would be very unwise if he neglected to do so. Suppose, for instance, his business, which was formerly in a very prosperous state, has failed—can we condemn him for inquiring into the occasion of that failure? Would we not think him worthy of severe blame if he did not labor to find out the cause of this change in his circumstances, in order, if possible, to apply a remedy before it was too late?

Nor is all inquiry precluded in relation to the concerns of the nation. If there has been a plain and visible decline in the national prosperity, all who are affected by it are entitled, with modesty, to inquire whence that decline has arisen; and to express to those who are in authority their sentiments respecting it; and to point out what they conceive to be the most judicious and effectual means of remedying the existing evils.

In reference to the concerns of the soul, to neglect such inquiries would be the height of folly and wickedness. Suppose a person to have formerly walked with God, and experienced much of His presence in his soul, and now to have become destitute of all spiritual life and comfort—should not he ask, "Why were the former days better than these?" Yes, to examine into this matter is his bounden duty. The Apostle says, "Let a man examine himself." The Lord Jesus counsels the Ephesian Church, when they had left their first love, to "remember from whence they had fallen, and to repent, and do their first works" [[Revelation 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 2.5).]

So that it is clear, that the prohibition respecting such inquiries is not universal, but must be limited to such occasions as Solomon had more especially in view.

The comparisons which are here discouraged, are those which are the mere effusions of discontent.

In every age, discontented men have been forward to make this inquiry, "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" They make no endeavor to ascertain the correctness of their sentiments; but, taking for granted that they are right, they demand the reason of so strange a phenomenon. Now it is a curious fact, that this is the habit of discontented men in every age. Those who are now advanced in life, can remember, that, in their early days, the very same clamor was made by discontented men as at this hour. And, if we go back to every preceding generation, we shall find the same complaints respecting the deterioration of the times. But we shall never arrive at that time, when the people confessed themselves to be in that exalted state in which our imaginations place them.

Certainly, if ever there was a time and a place that might be specified as that happy era when there was no occasion for complaint, it was the state of the Jews in the days of Solomon; for, in respect of peace and prosperity, there never was a nation to be compared with the Jews at that time. Yet, behold, it was at that time, and under those circumstances, that the reproof was given: "Do not say: 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions."

Hence, then, we see what is the inquiry which Solomon discourages: it is that which has no just foundation, and which is the offspring of spleen and discontent.

These distinctions being duly adverted to, we are prepared to see,

II. Why the making of the inquiry is unwise.

I will assign two reasons:

1. It is an unwise inquiry, because it is erroneous in its origin.

It is not true that former times, on a large and extended scale, were better than these. Improvements may have been made in some respects, and matters may have been deteriorated in others; or particular people and places may be in less favorable circumstances now than formerly. Yet times have been much alike in all ages. There is in every time a mixture of good and evil. To every man this is a chequered scene. There are no people loaded with unqualified good, nor are there any oppressed with unmitigated evil. But men know of former times only by report, and by very partial report too. Whereas, existing circumstances they know by actual experience. Moreover, they are more observant of one evil, than of a hundred blessings.

In relation to our own times and country, the very reverse of what is here assumed is true. Never did the nation stand higher amidst the nations than at this day [1822.] Never was civil liberty held more sacred, or better regulated for the good of the community. Never did religion flourish in a greater extent. Never was there such a combination of all ranks and orders of men to diffuse religion and happiness over the face of the earth. Never were the wants and necessities of human nature provided for in such a variety of forms. There is not a trouble to which humanity is exposed, but societies are formed to prevent or to alleviate its pressure. Never were the blessings of education so widely diffused. In a word, such is the increase of all that is good among us, and such the efforts making to extend it over the face of the whole earth, that, instead of looking to former times as better than our own, we may rather hail the approach of the millennial period, when the Messiah himself shall reign, and diffuse peace and happiness over the face of the whole earth!

2. It is an unwise inquiry, because it is pernicious in its tendency.

What is the tendency of this inquiry, but to hide from our eyes the blessings we enjoy, and to magnify in our minds the evils we endure, and to render us dissatisfied even with God himself? It is notorious, that those who are most clamorous about the comparative excellence of former times, pass over all our present mercies as unworthy of notice! Nothing has any attraction for them, but some real or supposed evil. Their aim is to diffuse the same malignant feeling throughout the whole community. And, though in their own immediate purpose they do not intend to complain of God himself, they do so in effect—for it is his providence that they arraign, and his dispensations that they incriminate [[Exodus 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exod 16.7), [Numbers 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 14.27).] "There is not evil in the city, any more than good, but God is the doer of it" [[Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Amos 3.6).]" And it were far more likely to be rectified through personal humiliation before him, than by intemperate and factious clamors against his instruments.

In the midst of such complaints there is not a word to call forth gratitude to God, or even submission to his holy will. There is . . .  
  no recollection of our ill deserts,  
  no admiration of God's tender mercies,  
  no encouragement to praise and thanksgiving.

Nothing but murmuring is uttered, and nothing but discontent is diffused. Whether, therefore, men consider their own happiness, or the happiness of the community, they will do well to abstain from this invidious inquiry. If at any time they feel disposed to make it, to ascertain, in the first instance, that the grounds of their inquiry are just.

III. A word of ADVICE shall close the present subject.

1. Instead of complaining of the times, let us all endeavor to make them better.

Much is in our power for the improvement of the worst of times. It must be expected, in this distempered world, that troubles of some kind or other will arise—they cannot be wholly averted from individuals, or families, or nations. "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows" [[John 16:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 16.33).] But if all ranks of the community would unite, as they might well do, to lighten the burdens of each other, and to contribute, according to their respective abilities, to the happiness of the community—we would have little occasion to complain of present times, and none at all to institute invidious comparisons with former times.

2. Let us seek that which will render all times and seasons happy.

True religion is a cure and antidote to every ill, whether of a public or private nature. Among those who were endued with piety in the Apostolic age, you find none who were murmurers and complainers. Their habit of mind is better expressed by those words of the Apostle, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. " [[Philippians 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.11-13).]

Having tasted of redeeming love, they had become comparatively indifferent to everything else. Whatever they possess, they account on undeserved mercy. Whatever they lack, they regard as scarcely worthy of a thought. They know that "all things shall eventually work together for their good." They are hidden in the secret of their Savior's presence; and while the minds of others are agitated with violent and malignant passions, theirs are "kept in perfect peace."

This, then, I would earnestly recommend to you: Let your first concern be about your own souls. Seek for reconciliation with your offended God; and endeavor to walk in the light of his countenance. Then, whatever others may do, you may look forward to better times, when all troubles shall have fled away, and your happiness be unalloyed in the bosom of your God!

The Excellence of Spiritual Wisdom

**[Ecclesiastes 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.12)**, "Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor."

To have our minds well regulated in reference to religion is most desirable. There is, in reality, no discordance between the duties which we owe to God and to man; or between our callings as men, and our callings as Christians. The things which relate to this world demand our attention, as well as those which relate to a future state. If, on the one hand, our worldly pursuits ought not to thrust out religion; so neither, on the other hand, should our pursuit of heavenly things lead us to neglect any part of our worldly occupations.

God has said, "Six days shall you labor; but the seventh day you shall keep holy to the Lord." This shows, that we then only perform our duty aright, when we comprehend in our daily services a well-regulated devotion to the concerns of time, and to the interests of eternity.

The two great objects of general pursuit are "wisdom, and money." The one is followed only by a select portion of the community; the other is sought by all; but, whichever of the two any man affects, provided he give to heavenly pursuits the chief place, he does right to prosecute it with zeal and diligence: being "not slothful in business, and yet fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" [[Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 12.11).] This combination of duties is spoken of in our text: for the elucidation of which, I will show,

I. The excellency of wisdom above riches.

We are here told, that both wisdom and money are good in their place.

Both the one and the other of these are "a defense," or, as the word imports. "a shadow." Now, as a shadow affords to people a protection from the heat of the solar rays, so do wisdom and money screen him from many of the calamities of life, and afford to him many sources of enjoyment, of which those who are not possessed of them are deprived.

Money will enable a person to choose his employment in life, while the most menial and painful offices are left for those who are not able to choose for themselves. It provides also many comforts, to which the poor are altogether strangers. In a time of sickness, especially, its use is felt; for, by means of it its possessors often obtain relief, for the want of which their poor neighbors are left to sink.

Just so, wisdom also brings with it very extensive benefits, in that it elevates the character, and qualifies a man for stations, to which, from birth, he was not entitled to aspire. It provides, also, good occupation for the mind. Thus it protects him from that state of degradation to which many, for want of it, are reduced; and from that listlessness which induces people of an uncultivated mind to betake themselves to some evil employment for the sole purpose of getting rid of time.

True, indeed, neither wisdom nor money can protect us from every evil: disease or accident may assault one person as well as another: nor can they afford entire protection under any circumstances, any more than a shadow can altogether remove the heat of the atmosphere. But, as a shadow, they may screen us from much evil, and alleviate many pains which they cannot entirely ward off.

Wisdom has an excellency far above money.

Wisdom is more our own than money, which soon "makes itself wings and flies away." In many respects, also, has it a tendency to promote our welfare in life, beyond money. Riches rather contract the mind than enlarge it; whereas wisdom expands the mind, and dispels that conceit and insolence which characterize a purse-proud man. Money, too, when not combined with wisdom, leads a man into every species of dissipation and folly, and opens to him temptations to every kind of sensual indulgence. But wisdom provides for his mind such occupations as place him at a distance from temptation, and especially when his facilities for profuse expenditure are on a contracted scale. And thus the man of wisdom moves in a far safer and happier sphere; his pleasures being more refined, and his employments more innocent.

I may further observe, that riches render us a prey to designing men; and subject us to many vexations, to which less opulent people are but little exposed; whereas wisdom holds not forth any such baits to dishonest and designing men; who, if not disposed to join with us in our pursuits, will leave us, without interruption, to prosecute our own. Nor is it the least excellence of wisdom that it induces thoughtful habits, which are favorable to sobriety, to meditation, and to a candid investigation of conflicting interests: while money rather tends to dissipate thought, and to fix the mind only on present indulgences.

In a word, money, without wisdom, tends to the destruction of life; whereas wisdom, freed from the temptations of wealth, tends rather to the presentation of life, and to the securing of that equanimity which, to a worldly man, is the main source of comfort in the world.

While we thus acknowledge that both wisdom and money have, though in different degrees, their respective excellencies, we are constrained to maintain,

II. The excellence of **spiritual**wisdom above them both.

The benefit ascribed to wisdom in the latter clause of my text necessarily leads our thoughts to a different kind of wisdom from that which is mentioned in the former clause. And we find the same distinction made by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might: let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth" [[Jeremiah 9:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 9.23-24).] Here is a spiritual wisdom spoken of, which infinitely exceeds all that the wisest or richest of unenlightened men can possess. To make this clear, let it be remembered,

1. A man may possess all the wisdom and all the riches of the world, and yet be spiritually dead; but the smallest measure of spiritual wisdom "gives life to them that have it".

The manna which God gave by Moses to the Israelites in the wilderness supported life, but could not give it: whereas our Lord and Savior, whom that manna typified, gives life to all who believe on him [[John 6:47-51](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 6.47-51).] Now spiritual wisdom consists in the knowledge of Christ; as Christ himself has said, "This is life eternal, to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" [[John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.3).] And if we be but "babes in Christ," still "have we passed from death unto life," and "have become new creatures in Christ Jesus" [[2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.17).]

2. Wisdom and riches too frequently lead men to self-confidence and creature-dependence; whereas spiritual wisdom invariably humbles the soul, and leads it to seek its all in Christ.

A life of faith in the Son of God is the very essence of all spiritual wisdom [[Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 2.20).]

3. By carnal wisdom, and by wealth, men are often betrayed into a contempt of all religion; whereas spiritual wisdom brings with it such a love to religion as gradually transforms the soul into the divine image.

Yes, in truth, faith, if genuine, will "purify the heart" [[Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 15.9).];" and "he who has a hope in Christ will purify himself, even as he is pure" [[1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.3).]

4. A man possessing wisdom and riches in their utmost extent, may perish; but a man that is wise towards God, is made "wise unto salvation" [[2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 3.15).]"

Hence it was that Paul, who in his unconverted state possessed a very abundant measure of these earthly talents, "considered them all but as dross and dung, in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ" [[Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.7-8).]

And hence Moses, also, who had attained all the learnings of the Egyptians, and was next in power to the king upon the throne, regarded it all as unworthy of a thought, not only for the crown of Christ, but in comparison to his cross; "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt" [[Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 11.26).] Yes, spiritual wisdom "has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" [[1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.8),]" and fully merits that high encomium which the wisest of men has bestowed upon it [[Proverbs 3:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 3.13-18).] "Whoever finds it, finds life, and shall to all eternity obtain favor of the Lord" [[Proverbs 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 8.35).]

Let us then learn,

1. To form a correct estimate of all that is before us.

Earthly things are not to be despised. Religious people just emerging from darkness unto light, are apt to pour contempt on wealth as if it were good for nothing, and greatly also to undervalue even intellectual attainments. But we should give to everything its due. Even to money are we indebted for numberless comforts, and to wisdom for much more; because money enables us to procure. Doubtless, in comparison of spiritual attainments, those which have respect only to the things of time and sense are of but little value. We may say of the moon and stars, that they are of small utility to us in comparison to the sun: but this does not render them of no value in themselves. The heavenly bodies possess great beauty and utility, notwithstanding they are eclipsed by the sun: and the true way to judge of their value to us is, to consider how painful the loss of them would be. So, while to heavenly things we ascribe, as we ought to do, a paramount importance; let us remember, that, for the purposes of this life at least, those things which are mainly regarded by the unregenerate, are, in their place, deserving also the attention of th godly. We may say of them, as our blessed Lord does of some other things of subordinate importance, "These things ought you to do, and not to leave the other undone."

2. To seek everything according to its real importance.

When it is said, "Labor not for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life"—we are not to take the expressions absolutely, but only comparatively; exactly as when it is said, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." I say, then, to those who are engaged in worldly business, Follow it diligently: and to those who are prosecuting any department of science, Strive to excel in it. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" [[Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 9.10).] The point on which I would entertain a jealousy is, "the placing of your affections on anything here below; for they are to be reserved exclusively for things above" [[Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.2).]

But I am aware that there is great reason for caution on this head. I well know how easy it is to enter with zeal into earthly pursuits; and how difficult to maintain the same ardor in the prosecution of heavenly things. Let me then remind you, that, whatever importance you may assign to the things of time and sense, they have no real importance, by reason of the superior importance of the things which are spiritual and eternal. These must occupy the whole soul, and engage all its powers. We must "run as in a race;" and "strive as for the mastery;" and fight as for our very lives: and we may rest assured, that the crown of victory that shall be awarded to us, will recompense all the labors we have endured in the prosecution of our duty, and in the service of our God.

Against an Over-righteous Spirit

**[Ecclesiastes 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.16)**, "Be not righteous overmuch."

This is the sheet-anchor of ungodly men. They hate to see a zeal for God and therefore endeavor to repress it. From the days of Cain to this hour, those who have been born after the flesh have persecuted those who have been born after the Spirit [[Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 4.29).] And when they find that neither contempt nor threatenings will avail anything, they will venture, as Satan before them did [[Matthew 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 4.6).], to draw their weapons from the very armory of God.

It must be confessed, that the sense of this passage is not obvious at first sight; and it has been variously interpreted by commentators. Some have thought it to be the speech of an infidel recommending Solomon. in reply to his observation in the preceding verse, to avoid an excess either in religion or in vice. But it is evidently a serious admonition given by Solomon himself. In verse 15 he mentions two things which had appeared strange to him, namely, Many righteous people suffering even unto death for righteousness sake; and, many wicked people, whose lives were justly forfeited, eluding, either through force or fraud, the punishment they deserved.

From hence he takes occasion to caution both the righteous and the wicked; the righteous, verse 16, not to bring trouble on themselves by an injudicious way of manifesting their religion, or to "suffer as evil-doers;" and the wicked, verse 17, not to presume upon always escaping with impunity; for that justice will sooner or later surely overtake them. He then recommends to both of them to pay strict attention to the advice given them, and to cultivate the true fear of God, verse 18, as the best preservative against wickedness on the one hand, and indiscretion on the other.

This being the sense of the whole passage, we proceed to the consideration of the text; in illustrating which we shall,

I. Explain the caution—

The misconstruction put upon the text renders it necessary to explain,

1. To what the caution does **not**extend—

Solomon certainly never intended to caution us against loving God too much; seeing that we are commanded to "love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength" [[Mark 12:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 12.30).] Nor against serving the Lord Jesus Christ too much; since he "died for us, that we might live to him" [[2 Corinthians 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.15).];" and we should be "willing to be bound or even to die for his sake" [[Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 21.13), [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 14.26).]. Nor against too much purity of heart; for we are required to purify ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit [[2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 7.1).], yes, to purify ourselves even as he is pure [[1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.3).] Nor could he mean to caution us against too much deadness to the world; for, provided we conscientiously fulfill the duties of our station, we cannot be too much "crucified to the world" [[Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 6.14).] We should no more be of the world than Christ himself was [[John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 17.16).] Nor, lastly, did he intend to warn us against too much compassion for souls; for, provided our mode of manifesting that compassion be discreet, it would be well if our "head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, to weep for the ungodly day and night" [[Jeremiah 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 9.1).]

These indeed are things in which the world does not wish to see us much occupied: they would rather that we should put our light under a bushel. But no inspired writer would ever caution us against excess in such things as these. Paul makes the proper distinction between the regard which we should show to carnal and to spiritual objects: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;" because therein is no possibility of excess [[Ephesians 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.18).]

2. To what the caution does extend—

An intemperate seal appears to be the principal thing against which the text is leveled. Too high a conceit of our own wisdom, a hasty persuasion that we are right, and an indiscreet method of fulfilling what we suppose to be our duty, may be found in people who really mean well. Two apostles, from zeal for their Master, would have called fire from Heaven to consume a village that had refused him admission [[Luke 9:54](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 9.54).] A third apostle defended his Master with a sword, to the endangering of his own life, and to the dishonor of the cause he had espoused [[John 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 18.10).] Thus do many at this day contend for the truth in private in an unfitting spirit, and go forth to propagate it in public to the neglect of their proper duty, and the injury of the Christian cause [[1 Corinthians 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 7.20).]

A blind superstition may also be fitly comprehended in the caution. This obtained in a very great degree among the judaizing Christians: and still prevails over a great part of the Christian world: would to God we could except even Protestants themselves from the charge! How often do we see a most rigorous regard paid to rites that are of human invention, while the true spirit and temper of Christianity is sadly neglected! Alas! what fiery and fatal contentions have arisen from this source! There is a needless scrupulosity also which ought to be avoided. What schisms has this occasioned in the Church when, on account of one or two things, in which they could not agree, men have rent the seamless robe of Christ into a thousand pieces! What injury have men done to their bodies by penances of man's device! What trouble and perplexity have they also brought upon their souls by rash vows, and foolish impositions! Such was the spirit against which Paul guarded the Christians at Colosse [[Colossians 2:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 2.18-23).] And Solomon's caution against the same will be useful in every age and place.

A self-justifying dependence on our own works is nearly allied to the foregoing evils, and is thought by some to be the more immediate object of Solomon's censure. But if we allow it not the first place, we may very properly mention it as another mistaken method of displaying our righteousness. Every person is prone to it: and the most upright people need to be cautioned against it, because there is not anything more destructive in its outcome. It deprives us of all the benefit of whatever good we do; yes, it makes even the death of Christ of no effect to us [[Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.4).] We can never therefore be too strongly guarded against it. We may have much zeal of this kind: but it is a zeal without knowledge. Nor is there any salvation for us, unless, like the holy Apostle, we renounce it utterly [[Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.9).]

Having explained at large the import of this caution, we shall,

II. Subjoin some advice—

We fear that, however great occasion there may be to caution sincere people against erroneous methods of exercising their religion, there is far more occasion to exhort the world in general to pay some attention to their duty. Our first advice therefore is,

1. Be truly righteous—

They who are most ready to quote the text, are, for the most part, those who are adverse to the exercise of all religion. And when they exclaim, 'Be not righteous over-much,' their meaning is, 'Be not righteous at all.' They would be far better pleased to see all walking in the broad road, than to be put to shame by those who are walking in the narrow path. But let no scoffs keep you from the performance of your duty. If the world set themselves against religion, let not that deter any upright soul. Our Lord has taught us to expect that our "greatest foes would be those of our own household." Let us not be discouraged if we find it so.

Let our inquiry be, What is duty? and, having found that, let nothing turn us aside. Let us not be satisfied with the degree of righteousness which the world approves. Let us examine the Scripture to see what God requires. Let us see how the saints of old served God; and let us labor in everything to "do his will on earth, even as it is done in Heaven." This is a conduct which will tend, not to our destruction, but salvation. To act otherwise will issue in our ruin; since "Whoever does not righteousness is not of God" [[1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.10).] But to walk after this rule is to ensure present and everlasting peace.

2. Be wisely righteous—

"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" and to "maintain a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." But we are far from recommending a wild inconsiderate regard for religion. We ought to exercise a sound judgment in all things. "I Wisdom," says Solomon, "dwell with Prudence" [[Proverbs 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 8.12).] There is certainly much room for discretion in the performance of our duty even towards God himself. We may so reprove a fault as to harden those whom we endeavor to reclaim, and, by casting pearls before swine, may cause them to turn again and rend us [[Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 7.6).] We may exercise our Christian liberty so as to cast a stumbling-block before others, and destroy the souls whose salvation we ought to seek to the uttermost [[1 Corinthians 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 8.11).]

Many things may be "lawful which are not expedient." We should therefore consult times, people, places, things [[Ecclesiastes 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 8.5)]; and "walk in wisdom toward those who are outside." Our determination should be, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way" [[Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 101.2).]," And our prayer should be, "O give me understanding in the way of godliness. In every part of our conduct we should be circumspect, that being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, we may shine among them as lights in the world."

Thus should we unite "the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove" [[Matthew 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.16).] And in so doing we shall both adorn our holy profession, and "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

3. Be righteous enough—

There is more danger of defect, than of excess in this pursuit. Indeed wherever you are truly righteous, it is not possible to be righteous overmuch. We are to "walk as Christ himself walked," and to "be perfect even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect." Have you attained much? be thankful for it, but go forward. If you were as holy as Paul himself, you must "not think you have already attained, or are already perfect—but, like him, you must forget the things that are behind, and reach forward unto that which is before, and press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The higher you are in grace, the richer will you be in glory.

Begin then, all of you, to "run the race that is set before you." The prize is worth all your care. Lose it not for want of due exertion. But "laying aside every weight, and the sin that does most easily beset you, run with patience your appointed course, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of your faith," and let your constant motto be, "This one thing I do" [[Philippians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.13).]

Endeavor, every step you take, to walk in the fear of God. This is the advice of Solomon himself [verse 18]; nor can there be any better preservative against extremes than this. By this you will be kept from the undue bias of fleshly wisdom, and from consulting with flesh and blood: by this you will be enabled to maintain your conduct in the world with "simplicity and godly sincerity." Cultivate this, and the path of duty will be clear: cultivate this, and you will never lose the promised reward.

Man's Original and Present State

**[Ecclesiastes 7:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.29)**, "Lo, this only have I found, that God has made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."

The whole scope of this book is to show the vanity of the world, and all things in it. As in the earth itself there is a visible proof that some great convulsion has taken place; so, in everything that is passing upon the earth, there is the clearest evidence imaginable that some great moral change has been effected. It cannot possibly be, that the world, which still bears such innumerable traces of wisdom and goodness in its first creation, should have proceeded from its Maker's hands in such a state as it now appears.

In fact, the whole world is out of course. The very elements are, on many occasions, hostile to man; and man, in ten thousand instances, is an enemy to himself, to his species, and to his God. And "what is thus crooked, who can make straight?" [verse 13] Who can ward off the effects of all this disorder from his own person or estate? A monarch is the victim of it, no less than the lowest of his subjects; and the saint, no less than the despiser of all true religion.

To what, then, or to whom, shall we ascribe this state of things? The wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome were unable to account for it. But the Holy Scriptures inform us, that the whole creation, as originally formed, was perfect; but sin, entering into the world, effected both a natural and a moral change upon it: so that the man who looks into the Holy Scriptures can solve every difficulty at once, by saying, "Lo, this have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions," and thereby reduced the world, and everything in it, to the state of disorganization in which it now appears.

In illustration of my text, I shall be led to notice both the primitive and the present state of man, and to show,

I. His uprightness, as formed by God—

We are expressly told, that "God created man after his own image" [[Genesis 1:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 1.26-27).] When, therefore, man came from his Creator's hands, he was perfect:

1. In his **intellectual**faculties—

His mind was light: and in him was no darkness at all, in reference to anything which he was concerned to know. He had a clear knowledge of God, and of his perfections, so far as those perfections were stamped upon the visible creation. The wisdom, the goodness, the power of God, were all apprehended by him, and duly appreciated. He was acquainted also with his own nature, and his obligations to God: seeing the full extent of his duty towards him, as well as all the motives and inducements which he had for the performance of it. Moreover, he saw all these things intuitively, and not by long consideration or rational deduction. They were all stamped upon his very soul, and constantly before his eyes: and he had the same consciousness of them as he had of his own existence.

2. In his **moral**dispositions—

The Law of God was written upon his heart, that he might know it: and, at the same time, the love of it also was engraved there, so that he had not the slightest inclination to violate it in any one particular. It was no difficulty to him to love God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength: it was the very element in which he breathed: the bent of his soul was wholly towards it. Flame did not more naturally ascend in the atmosphere than did his soul, with all its powers, ascend to God. As dear as Eve was to him, she did not rival God in his affections. Everything was subordinated to his Maker; nor was even a thought entertained in his mind, which had not a direct and immediate tendency to honor him. In a word, he was to God as the impression to the seal: nor was there found one lineament upon his heart which had not been stamped there by God himself.

Had man continued thus, the whole creation would have retained its original constitution. But man fell; and brought a curse upon the whole world [[Genesis 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.17)]: everything more or less participating in,

II. His obliquity, as deformed by sin—

Man, through the instigation of Satan, desired to be wise as God himself. Not contented with knowing "good," he would know "evil" also [[Genesis 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.5-6).]; little thinking how impossible it was for light and darkness to exist together. Since that first device, whereby he fell, he has "sought out many inventions;" whereby to remedy, if possible, the first evil which he brought upon himself. Thus his descendants seek,

1. How to rid themselves of all restraint from God—

They conceive of God, as resident in Heaven; and as so remote from this vain world, as scarcely to take any notice of it, or concern himself about it. Besides, from a pretended regard for his glorious Majesty, they conceive it far beneath him to notice the affairs of men, so that the language of their hearts is, "The Lord shall not see, neither will the Almighty regard it" [[Psalm 94:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 94.7).]

But, as they cannot be certain but that he does inspect their ways, they endeavor to get at as great a distance from him as possible. If at any time, by means of the preached word, or by any remarkable providence, he is brought near to them, they endeavor to shut their eyes, and to flee to anything which may assist them in banishing him from their thoughts. To himself they say in effect, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of your ways" [[Job 21:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 21.14-15).] And to his servants they say, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" [[Isaiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 30.11).] It was thus that our first parents acted, when they strove to "hide themselves from God in the midst of the garden," and thus do sinners of the present day act, fleeing to business and pleasure and company, and anything that may serve to drive the remembrance of him from their minds. And he who could contrive any fresh amusement or employment that should have this effect upon their minds, would be accounted one of the greatest benefactors of the human race. That which is, in fact, their heaviest curse, is sought by them as the richest blessing; namely, "to be without God in the world" [[Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.12),] and "not to have him in all their thoughts" [[Psalm 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.4).]

2. How to make to themselves gods more suited to their taste—

Men feel that they must, of necessity, depend on something outside of themselves for their happiness, since they have no perennial source of it within themselves. But Jehovah is not one in whom they can find delight: hence, as the Israelites made a golden calf, and worshiped it, so these make to themselves objects of supreme regard, to which in heart and mind they cleave, as sources of satisfaction to their souls. Some, like the ignorant heathen, bow down to stocks and stones, and say, "You are our gods" [[Hosea 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 14.3).] Others, with equal, though less palpable, absurdity, set their affections on the pleasures, riches, and honors of this life, making "a God of their belly [[Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.19)], or putting their confidence in gold [[Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.5), [Job 31:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 31.24-25)], or "seeking the honor of man, rather than that which comes from God alone" [[John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.44).]

These all, in fact, "forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" [[Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13).]

All, indeed, have not the same pursuit: but all have some "idol in their hearts" [[Ezekiel 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 14.4)], which is to them a God: and all "will walk in the name of that God" [[Micah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah 4.5)], looking to it for happiness, and confiding in it for support. This is an "invention," not peculiar to any age or place: it is "sought out," and carried into effect, by every child of man; there not being a natural man upon the face of the whole earth who does not, in one shape or other, "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator; who is blessed for evermore" [[Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.25).]

3. How to hide from themselves their own deformity—

One would suppose that the impiety of this conduct should appear at once to every man who is capable of the least reflection. But men contrive, by various arts, to hide it from themselves. They, in the first place, determinately "call evil good, and good evil: they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" [[Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 5.20).] Then, not being able to conceal from themselves that they have committed some iniquity, they compare themselves, not with the word of God or with the saints of old, but with people all around them: of these, however, they will select for the purpose those only whom they think not better than themselves: and thus will they satisfy themselves that they are as good as others.

If there are some particular evils, of which their consciences accuse them, they will endeavor to find out some good deeds to put into the opposite scale, and to neutralize the effect of them upon their minds: or, if they cannot easily do this, they will satisfy themselves, that, though their actions have been evil, their intentions have been good: they have injured nobody but themselves; they have good hearts: and what they have done amiss, was not so much their own fault, as the fault of human-nature in general, and of the temptations to which they were exposed, and of the people who were their associates in iniquity.

Thus, as our first parents sought "to hide their nakedness by fig-leaves" [[Genesis 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.7)], so do all men by nature strive, by every device they can think of, to hide from themselves, and from each other, their real state.

4. How to persuade themselves that all will end well with them at the last—

They will not believe that eternal punishment can ever be inflicted on people for such offences as theirs. They think that God is too merciful to proceed in such a way. And, if he did, what must become of the whole world? All who die, are considered as having gone to their rest; and no one ever once thinks of them as in a state of misery.

Why then should not they, when they die, go to their rest? or what reason can they have to apprehend that any misery awaits them? But, supposing that God's threatenings were true, they intend to repent at some convenient season; and have no doubt but that a gracious God will avert his displeasure from them, in answer to their prayer. It is possible, indeed, that they may be called away suddenly (as many are), and not have time to realize their good intentions: but then the suddenness of their removal will plead their excuse, and their purposes be accepted as though they had been performed.

Thus, by means of these inventions which men have sought out, they are kept in a constant state of delusion; wearying themselves in the pursuit of vanities which elude their grasp, and filling with vexation both themselves and all around them.

We may see from hence,

1. What is the true intent of the Gospel—

The Gospel is to remedy all this evil, and to restore man to the state of holiness and happiness from which he has fallen. It is to rectify our views of God, and make us see what a great and holy and gracious God he is. It is to make him known to us in the person of his Son, and to fill our souls with admiring and adoring thoughts of his love. It is to bring us also to the knowledge of ourselves, as lost and utterly undone; and to engage our whole souls in the service of our God, as his rightful property, his purchased possession.

Beloved Brethren, this is an invention of God; planned in his eternal counsels; and carried into effect on Mount Calvary: and, if duly received, it will be effectual to dissipate at once all our "inventions." It will not indeed remove all the evils that abound in the world: there will yet remain much that is "crooked, and that cannot be made straight;" but it will sanctify those evils, and overrule them for our greater good: its operations, however, will be gradual, especially as far as relates to the restoration of the divine image on our souls. We shall be "renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him who created us" [[Colossians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 3.10).] We shall also be "created, after God's image, in righteousness and true holiness" [[Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.24).] But then, in both respects, our light will be progressive, advancing like that of the sun, from its earliest dawn to its meridian height [[Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 4.18).] This is the change which the Gospel has wrought on millions of the human race: and that Gospel shall yet be found, by every true Believer to be "the power of God to the salvation of his soul."

2. How we may know whether it has produced its due effect upon us—

You have heard what it was intended to do; namely, to remove all the obliquity of our fallen nature, and to restore the uprightness in which we were at first created. These are therefore the points for you to inquire into, in order to form a just estimate of your state. Can you say, "I have found this?" And can you further say, that the delusions by which the devil has formerly led you captive, are now dissipated and dispelled? Can you declare yet further, that the intellectual and moral qualities, which man originally possessed, are progressively forming within your souls? Here are marks which may easily be discerned; and which will with great accuracy determine, not only the truth, but also the measure, of the change that has taken place within you.

Alas! alas! on far the greater part of us, it is to be feared, no such change as this has ever taken place at all. The greater part of us still live far from God; still have our affections fixed on things below; still are unhumbled before God; and buoying ourselves up with the vain hopes of future happiness, though there is no one lineament of the divine image formed upon our souls. If this be the case with you, my Brethren, deceive yourselves no longer; but "today, while it is called today, cease to harden your hearts;" and begin to seek the mercy which God has offered you in the Son of his love.

If however, after careful self-examination, you have an evidence of a work of grace upon your souls, then press forward for the attainment of more grace, and for a more perfect restoration to the divine image. If you do this in earnest, then even this present world will be less a scene of confusion to you than it was in your unconverted state; and, in the world to come, the glories of Paradise shall be forever yours. You shall be admitted into the sweetest fellowship with your God; and "be fully like him, because you shall see him as he is" [[1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.2).]

Man's Abuse of God's Patience

**[Ecclesiastes 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 8.11)**, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

Sin is in itself an evil of a crimson dye; nevertheless its malignity may be greatly increased by the aggravations with which it is attended. One can scarcely conceive anything that can enhance its guilt so much, as the committing of it in hopes that God's mercy will pardon it. Yet this is the very ground on which the world indulge themselves in the commission of it."Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

I. The extent of man's wickedness—

That sin exists in the world is visible to all; but the degree in which it prevails is very little known. In what way men sin, we may judge from the exceeding depth of coloring which there is in the picture before us.

1. They sin HABITUALLY—

All are not equally wicked in their lives, but all forget God, and neglect their own souls. Successive years serve only to confirm this habit. We may all adopt the confession of the church of old: "Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God." [Jeremiah 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.25)

2. They sin DELIBERATELY—

It were well if we never sinned, but through ignorance or inadvertence; but what schemes have we formed for the accomplishment of sinful purposes! How often have we seen the sinfulness of our desires, and yet gratified them! [[Romans 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.32)] The very bent and inclination of our souls has been towards wickedness! [[Job 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 15.16).]

3. They sin WITHOUT RESTRAINT—

A regard to our reputation or interests may impose some restraint. A fear of Hell may also prevent the gratification of some desires. But few are kept from evil, like Joseph, by the fear of God [[Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 39.9).] that is the only restraint which proves uniformly effectual [[James 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 2.11).]

4. They sin WITHOUT REMORSE—

We must at times have felt some convictions of conscience, but we, for the most part, stifle them by company, amusements, etc. Many attain to dreadful hardness of heart and impenitence [[1 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.2).] The prophet's description may well be applied to each of us [[Jeremiah 8:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 8.5-6).]

Thus are "men's hearts fully set in them to do evil"—

They walk after the imagination of their own hearts: neither mercies nor judgments can prevail with them to do otherwise.

If their sins were followed by a visible and immediate punishment, men would not dare to live in this manner; but God defers the execution of his judgments.

II. The OCCASION of man's wickedness—

God is not an unconcerned spectator of sin. He has appointed a day for the revelation of his righteous judgment. At present he forbears to inflict vengeance. This very forbearance emboldens men to sin, "because," "therefore." From the delay of punishment men think,

1. That there is but little "evil" in sin—

God indeed calls sin "an evil work," but his forbearance towards sinners is thought to indicate indifference. This however is a fatal delusion. He has marked the evil of sin in many awful instances [[2 Peter 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.4-6);] he will soon undeceive this blind infatuated world [[Ephesians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 5.6).]

2. That there is no "sentence" gone forth against it—

Men would gladly persuade themselves that they have no cause to fear. The temptation whereby the serpent beguiled Eve is cherished by them [[Genesis 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 3.4).] But the wrath of God is indeed denounced against sin [[Romans 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.8-9).] Every species and degree of sin renders us obnoxious to his displeasure [[Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.18).]

3. That the sentence (if there is any) will never be "executed"—

Since God defers punishing, it seems possible that he may decline it altogether. The apparent disproportion between the offence and the punishment, seems to countenance this idea. To confirm our hope we are apt to compare God with ourselves [[Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 50.21).] But, however long God delays, he will surely strike at last [[Ecclesiastes 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 8.12-13).]

Thus it is that men act in every age—

David mentions this effect as arising from it in his day [[Psalm 55:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 55.19).] Peter foretells the prevalence of this iniquity in the last days [[2 Peter 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 3.3-4).] Experience proves how universally it prevails at this hour.

INFERENCES—

1. How great the folly, as well as wickedness, of unregenerate men!

If there were only a bare possibility of eternal punishment, how mad would it be to continue in sin! But God has pledged himself that he will inflict it on the impenitent [[Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 25.46).] Every moment's continuance in sin increases the condemnation [[Romans 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.4-5).] What extreme folly then is it so to abuse the forbearance of God! May we be ashamed of ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.

2. What need have we to be cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ!

What but the blood of Christ can ever expiate the guilt we have contracted? Who but the Spirit of Christ can ever deliver us from such habits? That we can never renew our own souls is certain [[Jeremiah 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 13.23).] Let us therefore wash in the fountain opened for us [[Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zech 13.1).]; and let us apply to God for his almighty aid [[Lamentations 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lam 5.21).]

3. How dreadful must be the state of those who continue impenitent!

There is a certain measure of iniquity which sinners are left to fill up [[Genesis 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 15.16).] When this is full, nothing can avert the divine vengeance [[1 Thessalonians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Thess 2.16).] Already are the arrows of divine justice pointed at them! [[Psalm 7:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 7.11-13).] Eternity itself will be the duration of the punishment [[Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 9.43-48).] The time is coming when Jerusalem's state will be ours [[Luke 19:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 19.42).] Let us then tremble lest we exhaust the divine patience [[Zephaniah 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Zeph 2.2-3).] Let us diligently improve this day of salvation [[2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 6.2).]

The Blessedness of Fearing God

**[Ecclesiastes 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 8.12)**, "Surely I know that it shall be well with those who fear God."

Nothing certain can be determined respecting God's favor, from the outward dispensations of his providence [[Ecclesiastes 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 9.1).] The wicked seem on the whole to prosper more than others [[Psalm 73:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.5); [Psalm 73:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.12).] Nevertheless the godly are by far the happier people [[Psalm 73:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.15).] It is of them alone that the assertion in the text can be made.

We propose to show,

I. Who they are that fear God—

This, we may suppose, would be a point easy to be determined; but, through self-love and Satan's devices, many mistake respecting it. The characters described in the text may be distinguished by the following marks:

1. They stand in awe of God's judgments—

Once they disregarded the displeasure of the Almighty [[Psalm 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 10.5).] They would not believe that his threatenings would be executed. But now they have learned to tremble at his word [[Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 66.2).] Awakened by his Spirit, they exclaim with the prophet [[Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 33.14).] The Scriptures uniformly represent them in this light [[Acts 16:29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 16.29) and [Psalm 119:120](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.120).]

2. They embrace the salvation offered them—

In their natural state they felt no need of a physician [[Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 3.17).] They saw no suitableness in the remedy which the Gospel offered them [[1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 1.23).] Their pride would not allow them to submit to its humiliating terms [[Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 10.3).] But now they gladly embrace Christ as their only Savior. They flee to him, as the murderers did to a city of refuge. This is the description given of them in the inspired volume [[Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.18)].

3. They endeavor to keep all the commandments—

If ever they obeyed God at all, they served him only to the extent the world would approve. Where the lax habits of mankind forbad their compliance with the divine command, they were afraid to be singular. But they dare not any longer halt between God and Baal: they have determined, through grace, to follow the Lord fully. The language of their hearts is like that of David [[Psalm 119:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.5-6).] This was the very ground on which God concluded that Abraham feared him [[Genesis 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 22.12).]

These marks clearly distinguish those who fear God from all others—

The formal Pharisee has never felt his desert of condemnation [[Luke 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 18.11).]

The merely awakened sinner has never truly embraced the Gospel [[Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 24.25); [Acts 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 26.28).]

The hypocritical professor has never mortified his besetting sin [[Acts 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 8.23).]

It is the person alone, who fears God, that unites in his experience a dread of God's wrath, an affiance in Christ, and a love to the commandments.

Such people, notwithstanding appearances, are truly blessed.

II. In what respects it shall be well with them—

They are not exempt from the common afflictions of life. They have in addition to them, many trials peculiar to themselves; yet it goes well with them,

1. In respect of TEMPORAL good—

They have a peculiar enjoyment of prosperity. The ungodly find an emptiness in all their possessions [[Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 20.22).] But the godly have not such gall mixed with their comforts [[Proverbs 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 10.22), [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.17).] They have also peculiar supports in a season of adversity. The wicked are for the most part miserable in their affliction [[Ecclesiastes 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 5.17).] If they are kept from murmuring, it is the summit of their attainments: but the righteous are enabled to glory in tribulation [[Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 5.3).], and cordially to approve of God's dispensations towards them [[2 Kings 20:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Kings 20.19).]

2. In respect of SPIRITUAL good—

They possess a peace that passes all understanding. They are filled with a joy utterly unknown to others [[Proverbs 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 14.10).] The work of sanctification is gradually carried on within them [[2 Corinthians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 4.16).] As they approach towards death they grow in a fitness for Heaven, and are serene and happy in the near prospect of eternity [[Psalm 37:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 37.37).]

3. In respect to eternal good—

Who can set forth their felicity in the eternal world? Who can even conceive the weight of glory preparing for them? How will their faith be lost in sight, and their hope in enjoyment! Then indeed will that truth be seen and felt by them [[Psalm 144:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 144.15).]

These things are far from being "cunningly devised fables."

III. What assurance we have that it shall be thus well with them—

No truth whatever is capable of clearer demonstration. The topics from whence it might be proved are innumerable; we shall however confine ourselves to three:

1. The fitness of things requires it—

No man can seriously think that there is one and the same portion to the righteous and the wicked. There is no well-ordered government on earth where this is the case: much less can we suppose it possible in the divine government. To imagine such a thing, is to strip the Deity of all regard to his own honor. We may be sure that there shall be a distinction made in favor of his servants [[Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mal 3.18).]

2. The promises of God insure it—

All temporal good is expressly promised to those "who fear God [[Psalm 34:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 34.9).]" All spiritual good is also given them as their portion [[Psalm 25:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 25.12-13).] Yes, all eternal good is laid up for them as their unalienable inheritance [[Psalm 103:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 103.17).] All the promises are made over to them in one word [[1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.8).] Can anyone doubt a truth so fully established?

3. The experience of all who have ever feared God attests it—

Who ever found it unprofitable to serve the Lord? [[Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.31).] What truly devoted soul was ever forsaken by him? [[Isaiah 49:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 49.15).] Who ever complained that the means by which he was brought to fear God, were too severe. Who ever complained that any affliction that increased and confirmed that fear, was too heavy? David indeed did at one time question the position in the text: but on recollection he condemned himself for his rashness and ignorance, and acknowledged that his vile suspicions contradicted the experience of God's children in all ages [[Psalm 73:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.12-15); [Psalm 73:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 73.22).]

On these grounds we "assuredly know" the truth declared in the text—

We do not surmise it as a thing possible.

We do not hope it as a thing probable.

We absolutely know it as infallibly certain.

We are not surer of our existence than we are of this truth. Without hesitation therefore we deliver our message [[Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 3.10-11).] O that the word may sink deep into all our hearts! And that we might from experience unite our testimony to Solomon's [[Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 28.14).]

We beg permission to ask, whether those who do not fear God have any such assurance in their favor?

We are aware that they will entertain presumptuous hopes; and that, in opposition to God's word, they will expect happiness. But does the boldest sinner dare affirm that he knows it shall be well with him? His conscience would instantly revolt at such falsehood and blasphemy. Let those then who do not fear God, stand self-condemned. Let them flee unto their God and Savior with penitence and faith. Let them so live us to preserve the testimony of a good conscience. And then, however enlarged their expectations of good may be, they shall never be disappointed [[Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 45.17).]

The Wickedness, Madness, and Misery of Unregenerate Men

**[Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 9.3)**, "The hearts of men are full of evil, and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead."

If we look only on the surface of things, we shall think that all things come alike to all, since all are subject to the same afflictions, and go down to the grave in their appointed season. But the righteous, however afflicted, "are in the hands of God" [verse 1.] who orders and overrules everything for their good. Whereas the wicked, however prosperous, are left to run their career of sin, until they fall into the pit of everlasting destruction. The state and end of unregenerated men are awfully declared in the words before us; wherein is depicted,

I. Their wickedness—

"The hearts of unregenerate men are full of evil." Every species of filthiness, whether fleshly or spiritual [[2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 7.1).], abounds within them [[Romans 1:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 1.29-31).] They have not a faculty either of body or soul that is not defiled with sin [[Romans 3:10-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 3.10-18).] So full of iniquity are they, that there is no good within them [[Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 6.5). [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.18).] And this is the state, not of a few only, but of every child of man, until he has been renewed by the Holy Spirit [[John 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.6). [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 3.3) [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 17.9).]

II. Their madness—

It may well be expected that creatures so depraved should manifest their depravity in the whole of their conduct. And in truth they do so: for they are even mad. They pour contempt upon the greatest good. Can anything be compared with the salvation of the soul? And do they not disregard this! And is not such conduct madness?

They also disregard the greatest of all evils, the wrath of God. And would not this be madness—if there were only a bare possibility of their falling under his everlasting displeasure? How much more then, when it is as certain, as that there is a God! Moreover, they continue in this state, for the most part, "as long as they live." If they acted only through ignorance, or were drawn aside for a little time by temptation, or if they turned from this way, as soon as they came to the full exercise of their reason—yes, if they rectified their conduct as soon as their own consciences condemned it, they would have some shadow of an excuse. But when they persist against light and knowledge, against warnings and judgments—yes, against their own vows and resolutions, what is it but madness itself! Let a man act in such a way with respect to the things of this world, and no one will hesitate a moment to pronounce him mad [[Luke 15:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 15.17).]

III. Their misery—

However pleasant the ways of ungodly men appear, they will soon terminate in death and damnation [[Job 20:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 20.5-9).] But the righteous also must go the grave: no doubt therefore it is another death that is here spoken of, even "the second death in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." This is affirmed by God in the strongest manner [1 Corinthians 6:9. [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 9.17).] However disbelieved by those whom it most concerns, it shall assuredly be found true at the last. Yes, we have even now the consciences of men attesting this solemn truth: and if we should say, that the ungodly, after such a life, should go to Heaven, instead of to "the dead," though they might be wicked enough to wish it—they would not be mad enough to believe it. They have a presentiment, in spite of all their reasonings to the contrary, that "their end shall be according to their works [[2 Corinthians 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 11.15).]

INFERENCES—

1. How necessary is it to deal faithfully with the souls of men!

Should we "prophesy smooth things" unto people who are perishing in their sins, and who before another Sabbath may be gone to death and damnation? Should we, if we beheld a stranded vessel, seek to amuse the sailors, instead of affording them direction and assistance? How much less then if we ourselves were embarked with them, and were partners of their danger? Surely then every time we preach, we should bear in mind that both our hearers and ourselves are dying creatures, and that, if we forbear to warn them, we ruin ourselves forever [[Ezekiel 33:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 33.8).]

2. How earnestly should every one seek to be born again!

Does the notion of regeneration appear absurd? [[John 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.7); [John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.9).] Let all hear and understand the grounds of that doctrine. What must we think of God, if he should fill Heaven with sinners incorrigibly wicked, and incurably mad? Or what happiness could such sinners find in Heaven, even if they were admitted there? There must be a fitness for the heavenly state [[Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col 1.12).] That fitness can be obtained only by means of the new birth [[John 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.5-6).] A new heart must be given us, [[Ezekiel 36:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ezek 36.25-26)] and we must be made "new creatures in Christ Jesus [[2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 5.17).] Let all then seek this renewal of their hearts [[Ephesians 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.22-24).] For, unless they be born again, they shall never enter into God's kingdom [[John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.3).]

3. How greatly are all regenerate people indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ!

They were once as evil as others: if there was any difference, it was only in their acts, and not in their hearts [[Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 2.3).] But they are delivered from their sins [[Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 6.14); [Romans 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.2)], endued with soundness of mind [[2 Timothy 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 1.7)], and made heirs of everlasting life [[John 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 5.24).] All this they have received through the atoning blood and prevailing intercession of the Lord Jesus. What a Benefactor then is he! And how should the hearts of all be knit to him in love! O "let them give thanks whom the Lord has redeemed!" [[Psalm 107:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 107.1-2).] And let all seek these blessings at the hands of a gracious and almighty Savior.

Earnestness in Religion Recommended

**[Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 9.10)**, "Whatever your hand finds to do—do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave where you are going."

The greater part of mankind imagine that a continued round of worldliness and pleasure is consistent with true religion. But their opinion is contradicted by the whole tenor of Scripture, which uniformly enjoins deadness to the world and devotedness to God. There are however, some who err on the other side—and who make religion to consist in penances, and pilgrimages, and mortifications, and a total abstinence from all indulgences, however innocent, not excepting even the comforts and endearments of domestic life.

In direct opposition to these are the words of Solomon in all the preceding context. He contends that neither a cheerful use of the bounties of Providence, nor a prudent participation of the elegancies of life, nor a free enjoyment of conjugal affection—will at all interfere with our "acceptance with God," provided our ardor in the pursuit of heavenly things is not diminished by them [verse 7–10.] With this Paul also agrees: for he says, that "God has given us all things richly to enjoy;" and, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come."

It is not our intention, however, to enter into this general question; but rather to confine ourselves to the direction of Solomon in the text, in which we notice,

I. His advice—

Industry in temporal concerns is doubtless an important duty; and we may certainly understand the words before us as inculcating, and enforcing this duty. But the advice must relate also to spiritual concerns, in transacting which more especially, the utmost zeal is necessary.

Every man has a work to do for his soul—

The unconverted have to get a sense of their guilt and danger, to turn unto their God with the deepest penitence and contrition, and to have their souls renewed after the divine image.

The penitent have also a great work to do. They have only just set out upon their race, and have as yet all the ground before them, over which they are to run. They have to obtain the knowledge of Christ, and get their souls washed in his blood; and, in conformity to his example, to serve God in newness of heart and life.

The converted too, whatever attainments they may have made, have still much which their "hand finds to do." They have . . .  
many lusts to mortify,  
many temptations to withstand,  
many conflicts to sustain,  
many graces to exercise,  
many duties to perform.

To their last hour they will be required to "glorify God with their bodies and their spirits, which are his."

This work must be "done with all our might"—

It must be done speedily, without delay. None of us have any time to lose. Whatever our state at present is, we know not how long our lives may be continued. The young and healthy are mortal, as well as the old and diseased. The sturdy oak may be blown down—while the bending rush survives. We should therefore imitate David, who says, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep your commandments."

It must be done heartily, without remissness. It is not sufficient to enter upon this work with indifference, and to prosecute it in a cold lifeless manner. We must "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure," and "to be found of Christ in peace." We must "strive to enter in at the strait gate, since we may seek, and not be able." Even "the righteous are scarcely saved," and with great difficulty. If any dream of salvation as a matter easily to be accomplished, they will "perish in their own delusions."

It must be done perseveringly, without weariness. There is no period when we are at liberty to relax our endeavors. While we are in the world, we are still on the field of battle, and surrounded with enemies that are ever ready to take advantage of us. It is not until death that we can "put off the harness," "until then, there is no discharge in this warfare." We must "not faint, or be weary in well-doing, if ever we would reap;" but must "be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

To impress this beneficial advice upon our minds, let us proceed to consider,

II. The argument with which it is enforced—

We all are dying creatures, and continually hastening to the grave. Whether we are going to our business, or our pleasure, or our rest, wherever we are, and whatever we are doing, we are "going to our grave." The precise distance of our grave is hid from us. Some arrive at it almost as soon as they set out on their journey. Multitudes, when thinking of nothing less, drop into it suddenly, and are seen no more. Those who have walked towards it for a considerable time, have stronger and stronger intimations of their approach towards it. Many are seen with one foot already in it—and all, sooner or later, make it their long home.

From hence arise two very powerful arguments for enforcing diligence in the concerns of the soul.

1. There is "no work" to be done in the grave—

This life is the time for work: the next life is the time for recompense. The works needful to be done are, to "repent and believe the Gospel:" but in the eternal world there is no opportunity for performing either.

We cannot repent in the grave. A kind of repentance indeed there will be among those who have perished in their sins—they will "weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth" with anguish. They will be sorry, not that they sinned, but that they subjected themselves to misery. Sin will appear formidable to them on account of its consequences, but not hateful on account of its malignity. If they were restored to another state of probation, they would in a little time resume their former courses.

As now on a bed of sickness they promise to amend their lives, but, when restored to health, they become as careless as ever. So it would be with them if they returned even from Hell itself—their hearts are unrenewed, and consequently their deposition to "wallow in the mire" of sin would infallibly lead them into their former habits of worldliness and sensuality. They must forever remain the same obdurate sinners, because the Spirit of God will never descend into their hearts to renew them unto repentance.

We cannot believe in Christ in the grave. Those who have perished will, it is true, believe many things which now they disbelieve. They will believe that Christ is a Savior, and that he is the only Savior of sinful men: but they will never believe in him for salvation, because he will never again be offered to them as a Savior. No tidings of redemption will ever be heard in those dreary mansions. Never will they hear such words as those, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden." No promise of acceptance is given them; and therefore there can be no scope for the exercise of faith. Nor, if there were an opportunity to believe, would they be able to embrace it; because "faith is the gift of God;" and those who reject his offers of it in this world, will never have it offered to them in the world to come.

This argument cannot but have the greatest weight with every considerate mind; and the rather, because it is urged by our Lord himself: "Work while it is day; for the night comes wherein no man can work [[John 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 9.4).]

2. There is no **remedy**to be devised—

While we are in this world, our "knowledge and wisdom" may be applied with effect. There is a "device" for the restoration of God's banished people [Compare [2 Samuel 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 14.14) with [Job 33:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Job 33.24)]; and, if we are wise enough to adopt it, we cannot fail of obtaining mercy at the last day. But if we neglect to use the remedy which is now afforded us, then no other will remain for us; nothing can ever be devised whereby we may alter, or avoid, or mitigate, or shorten our doom.

We cannot ALTER our doom. When once the Judge has said, "Go, you who are cursed," we can never prevail on him to reverse the sentence, and say, "Come, you who are blessed." Now, though "we are under condemnation, and the wrath of God abides on us" [[John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.36),] yet we may obtain reconciliation through the blood of Jesus, and be made heirs of a heavenly inheritance. But no such change can be effected in the eternal world: "As the tree falls, so it will lie forever."

We cannot AVOID our doom. We may "call upon the rocks to fall upon us, and the mountains to cover us from the wrath of the Lamb," but they cannot perform the friendly office. "If we should go up to Heaven, or make our bed in Hell, or take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea—even there would God seize us, and thence would he bring us" by his irresistible power, in order that we might suffer the just penalty of our deeds.

We cannot MITIGATE our doom. Here men may flee to business or pleasure; they may drown care in intoxication, and obtain some relief from it in sleep; they may shake it off in a measure by infidelity. But in the eternal world they will find no jovial companions to associate with, nothing to divert their thoughts, nothing to alleviate their pains: "wrath will have come upon them to the uttermost," and their misery will be complete.

We cannot SHORTEN our doom. Men in this world have one method (as they think) of terminating their miseries—namely, by suicide. A poor and fatal device indeed! Yet such as it is, they resort to it for relief. But in the future world even this refuge will fail them: "they shall seek death, but shall not find it; and shall desire to die, but death shall flee from them [[Revelation 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 9.6).] Eternity will be the duration of their woe: "the smoke of their torment will ascend up forever and ever!"

How forcible then is this argument! If any "device" remained for them, and their "knowledge and wisdom" could be effectual for their relief, then they might be the more indifferent about the improvement of their day of grace. But since "this is the only accepted time, the only day of salvation," then surely they should "work out their salvation instantly with fear and trembling," and seek "the things belonging to their peace, before they are forever hid from their eyes."

APPLICATION—

1. Those who are **postponing**their work—

Like those who neglected the rebuilding of the temple, we are apt to say, "The time for this work is not yet come." Youth look forward to adult age; and they who are grown to manhood think that a more advanced period of life will be more favorable for the exercises of religion; and even the aged put off the work from day to day, hoping for some "more convenient season." But how many thousands perish by deferring that work which they acknowledge to be necessary! Sickness and death find them in an unconverted state, and hurry them unprepared into the presence of God. O that all of us, whether old or young, would guard against these fatal consequences, and turn to God "this day, while it is called Today."

2. Those who are **trifling**with their work—

There are many who would be offended, if they were thought regardless of religion, who yet by their listlessness and formality show that they have no real delight in it. They are exact in their attendance on ordinances; but they engage in them with a lukewarm Laodicean spirit: they have "the form of godliness, but not the power."

But what can such people think of the representations which the Scripture gives us of the Christian life? It is there described as a race, a wrestling, a combat—all of which imply the strongest possible exertions. Would to God that this matter were duly considered; and that we called upon "our souls, and all that is within us," to prosecute this great concern. To everything that might divert our attention from it, we should answer with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come down!" [[Nehemiah 6:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Neh 6.3-4).] It is in this way only that we shall ever be enabled to adopt the words of our dying Lord, "Father, I have glorified you on earth. I have finished the work which you gave me to do."

3. Those who are **heartily engaged**in their work—

While the greater part of mankind make their worldly duties an excuse for neglecting religion, there are some who run into a contrary extreme, and make their religious duties an excuse for neglecting their worldly concerns. But this will bring great dishonor on religion. We are placed in the world as social beings, and have civil and social, as well as religious, duties to perform. These must be made to harmonize, and all must be attended to in their order. We must "not be slothful in business, though we must be fervent in spirit; for in both we may serve the Lord."

Indeed our relative duties are, in fact, sacred; because they are enjoined by God, and may be performed as unto God: nor are they less acceptable unto him in their place than the more spiritual services of prayer and praise. While therefore we would exhort all to an immediate, earnest, diligent, patient, unremitted attention to the concerns of their souls, and encourage them to disregard all the persecutions which they may endure for righteousness sake—we would entreat them also to "walk wisely in a perfect way;" and to show by their conduct that religion is as conducive to the interests of society, as it is to the welfare of the soul.

Wisdom Notionally Approved, but Practically Disregarded

**[Ecclesiastes 9:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 9.14-16)**, "There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. So I said, 'Wisdom is better than strength.' But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded."

Whether the account here given us was an actual occurrence, or only a parabolic representation, we will not undertake to determine. But certainly the event described may easily be supposed to have taken place, and to have come to the knowledge of Solomon. In fact, a precisely similar event had taken place within the memory of Solomon; the only difference being, that the city was saved by "a wise woman," instead of "a poor wise man." After the rebellion of Absalom had been suppressed, a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, caused the defection of all the tribes of Israel. David therefore sent an army to pursue Sheba, and to besiege any city in which he could have taken refuge. Joab finding that Sheba was shut up in a city called Abel, went and "battered the wall of the city, to throw it down." Then "a wise woman" called to Joab, and remonstrated with him on the subject of the assault which he was making; and undertook, that, if he would suspend his assault, the object of his indignation would be sacrificed, and his head be cast over the wall. She then "went to all the people, in her wisdom," and prevailed on them to execute her project; and thus effected by her wisdom the deliverance of the city, and the preservation of all its inhabitants [[2 Samuel 20:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 20.1-2); [2 Samuel 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 20.6); [2 Samuel 20:15-22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 20.15-22).]

The minute resemblance which there is between this history and the event mentioned in the text, renders it highly probable that the passage before us is a parable, founded upon the very fact which is here recorded.

But, whether it is a fact, or a parable, with what view is it mentioned? Some think that it is intended to represent the work of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ, and the sad neglect with which he is treated, notwithstanding the benefits he has conferred. According to these people, the interpretation is this: The little city, with a small garrison, is the Church, which confessedly consists of but "a little flock." The great king who comes against it, and besieges it, is Satan, with all his hosts, even all the principalities and powers of Hell. The poor wise man is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the counsels of eternal wisdom, has devised a way for the deliverance of his people; yet after the deliverance he has wrought out for them, is by the generality most grievously neglected.

Now though there are parts of this which do not exactly accord with such an interpretation, yet we would not have altogether disapproved of the interpretation, provided Solomon himself had not given us any clew whereby to discover his real meaning: for it is not necessary that a parable should be applicable in all its parts: it is sufficient if in its main scope it be fitted to illustrate the point which it is intended to shadow forth.

But we are precluded from affixing to this passage the sense which we have now suggested, because Solomon's own reflection upon the supposed event determines beyond all controversy its precise meaning. Solomon intended to commend wisdom, as he frequently does in other parts of this book: in one place, he exalts wisdom above folly [[Ecclesiastes 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 2.13).]; in another place, he exalts wisdom above wealth [[Ecclesiastes 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.12).]; in another place, he exalts wisdom above soldiers [[Ecclesiastes 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 7.19).], and weapons of war [verse 18.] Thus in our text he exalts wisdom above strength, "Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength." Hence the subject for our consideration is two-fold:

I. The **excellency**of wisdom—

Wisdom is practical understanding, or knowledge regulated by sound judgment. Now wisdom is greatly superior to physical force, in every point of view:

1. In relation to **temporal**concerns—

The particular instance here adduced, the deliverance of a city by some extraordinary devices, will lead us to notice the operations of wisdom in the different departments of civilized life.

In war and politics wisdom prevails far beyond mere bodily strength, however great. It is from superior skill in arms that we, who are so few in number, have been enabled to conquer an immense extent of territory, and by a very small army to keep in subjection eighty million people, who have scarcely one feeling, or one sentiment, in common with ourselves. And it is from the wisdom of our Constitution, and of our Governors, that we, under God, have rode out the storm which overwhelmed the rest of Europe, and have been enabled to rescue from their bondage the prostrate nations all around us. Had there been less wisdom at our helm, we, and all the nations of Europe, would probably at this moment have been sunk in the lowest state of degradation and misery.

In arts and manufacturing the excellency of wisdom also most eminently appears. See the machinery that is used in every branch of trade! A few children are enabled to effect in a month, what thousands of grown people could not by mere manual labor accomplish in a year.

Nor is the excellency of wisdom less visible in science and philosophy. Who can calculate the benefits that have arisen from the study of astronomy, and the invention of the compass? How light is all human strength when placed in the balance against these products of intellectual research!

In truth, it is wisdom which most elevates us above the beasts; and draws as broad a line of distinction between man and man, as light and darkness do in the material world.

2. In relation to **spiritual**affairs—

Here wisdom is all. See what mere human efforts can effect in heathen lands: what penances, what pilgrimages, what sufferings of different kinds, will men have recourse to, in order to obtain peace in their own souls! yet they can never obtain it. They may weary themselves even unto death, yet they can never secure to themselves any spiritual benefit whatever.

But let a man attend to the councils of wisdom given him by our blessed Lord, and all that he can desire is attained at once. Peace will flow into his soul, as soon as ever his conscience is sprinkled with the blood of Christ. His spiritual powers are invigorated with supernatural strength, the moment he by faith apprehends the Lord Jesus. From being so weak as not to be able to do anything, he becomes instantly so strong as to be "able to do all things." [[John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 15.2). [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 4.13).]. A new set of energies are developed, and such as Satan is not able to withstand. That enemy, who with assured confidence of success besieged the soul, is constrained, like Sennacherib, to flee with precipitation and disgrace [[James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 4.7).] In a word, the simple device of a "life of faith upon the Son of God" effects everything, liberating the soul from all its bondage, and making it victorious over all its enemies.

But from daily observation, we are constrained to lament,

II. The disregard shown to religion, notwithstanding its acknowledged worth.

By how few are its dictates attended to as they ought to be! Alas! they are neglected and despised by the great mass of mankind.

1. By the **mirthful**and **thoughtless**—

They have no ear for the counsels of Wisdom. They will commend her in general terms; but will have as little as possible to do with her instructions. Let the parent labor ever so much to instill wisdom into the minds of his children, he will find, to his grief, that the enchantments of folly baffle all his efforts. It should seem no difficult task to prevail on them to think before they act, and to regulate their conduct by sound principles: but though he gives "line upon line, and precept upon precept," he will have reason to bless himself, if, after all his endeavors, his family do not embitter his days by their faults and follies.

The word of God too, may be acknowledged by them as good: but not a precept in it is allowed to have an ascendant over their mind. Sabbath after Sabbath divine instructions are poured into their ears; but none are allowed to descend into the heart. In fact, they are despised; and if obtruded upon the mind as principles of action, they are rejected with scorn and contempt.

2. By the **formal**and **self-righteous**—

Wisdom's sublimest dictates are by these, regarded as the reveries of a heated imagination. The whole life of faith is foolishness in the eyes of a self-righteous Pharisee. He sees no suitableness in it to the end proposed. He thinks that an attendance on ordinances, and a performance of some moral duties, are quite sufficient. Why should he mourn and weep over his sins? What is there in faith that can benefit his soul? Why may not his works find acceptance with God? In vain is he told that the Gospel is "the wisdom of God in a mystery;" and that the very angels in Heaven are made wiser by the revelation of it to the Church [[Ephesians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 3.10).]

In vain is he told what the Lord Jesus Christ, that "Wonderful Counselor," has done for the redemption of a ruined world, and will do in all who believe in him. No sense of obligation abides upon his mind; no expressions of gratitude flow from his lips: the Benefactor is forgotten, and the benefit despised—and he chooses rather to seek his resources within himself, than to depend for them on the bounty of another.

3. The **backsliding professor**—

The man who has once "professed godliness," has given his testimony to the excellence of wisdom. But when he declines from the way of godliness, he revokes his testimony, and becomes an open advocate for folly. He proclaims to all, that the ways of wisdom are incapable of affording him any solid comfort; or, at all events, that there is more happiness to be found in the vanities of time and sense, than in the service of the living God. Yes, backslider, you "exalt folly, and praise the wicked" [[Proverbs 28:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 28.4).] And, if you condemn, as you must, the inhabitants of the city that left their benefactor to pine away in poverty and contempt, then much more must you condemn yourself, who have, by your declensions, "crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

Let me now improve the subject, by recommending to your adoption,

1. A life of **consideration**and **thoughtfulness**—

The man who has begun to think and to consider, has already got more than half way to Heaven. It is lack of consideration that ruins the whole world. Would men but inquire from day to day, What have I done? Has it been consonant with the dictates of sound wisdom? Have I proposed to myself the best ends, and have I pursued them by the fittest means? how much evil would they avoid, and how much misery would they escape! O that I might prevail upon you to enter on such a course as this!

Admirable is that advice of Solomon, "Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house." [[Proverbs 24:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 24.27).] This is what any prudent builder will do, though he is only constructing a temporary habitation for the body. How much more should we do it, who are building for the immortal soul! Adopt this plan then: think what you have to do for God: think by what means you may best advance the interest of your souls; and redeem, as it were, every hour in preparation for eternity. "Walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

2. A life of **real piety**—

Nothing but sincere piety will inspire true wisdom—nothing but sincere piety will enable us to counteract with effect the assaults of our great adversary. Let us seek from above "a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might"—then, whether we are poor or rich, we shall assuredly be victorious.

Indeed the poor are for the most part more highly favored than the rich. The rich are too apt to be self-confident and self-sufficient; while the poor thankfully accept the offered aids of the Gospel. Hence "the things which are hid from the wise and prudent, are frequently revealed to babes;" and hence, while the rich are vanquished, the poor are crowned with victory.

Let it not be forgotten, that "in the Lord alone we have either righteousness or strength." "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty!" Yes, by the Spirit of the living God revealing the Savior to us, and communicating strength out of his fullness—we shall be "enabled to withstand in the evil day," and shall have that joyful song put into our mouths, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The Destructive Influence of Sinners

**[Ecclesiastes 9:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 9.18)**, "One sinner destroys much good."

The influence of every man in his sphere is considerable. Solomon had seen a remarkable instance of a poor man delivering by his wisdom a small and ill-garrisoned city from the besieging army of a very powerful monarch. From hence he was led to consider the superiority of wisdom above wealth or power.

On the other hand, he saw that, as a wise and good man might be extremely useful, so a foolish and wicked man might do a great deal of injury, to those around him. Hence, contrasting the two, he observed, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good."

In illustrating the latter member of the sentence, we shall point out the truth of it,

I. One sinner destroys much good in NATIONS—

Men of all classes in the community may greatly affect the state to which they belong.

A proud and ambitious monarch, how soon may he involve his people in war, and reduce them to the very brink of ruin! Such was Solomon's only son, who, in the space of a few weeks, goaded ten tribes out of the twelve that he ruled over, to revolt from him, and to establish a separate and independent kingdom [[1 Kings 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 12.16).]

An aspiring subject also may, by exaggerating the people's grievances, and promising them effectual redress, stir up multitudes to insurrection, and involve a nation in all the horrors of civil war. Thus did Absalom [[2 Samuel 15:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 15.2-6); [2 Samuel 15:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 15.10-14).] And thus have demagogues in every age, in every state.

What immense evil too may not a cruel persecutor effect! How may such an one waste the Church of God and destroy it! One Jezebel could murder a whole host of prophets [[1 Kings 18:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 18.13).]; and one Saul depopulate the Christian Church [[Acts 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 9.1-2).] And, in this nation as well as others, time was, when one cruel bigot, Bloody Mary, kindled fires in every part of the country, to extirpate, if possible, those who would not return to the justly reprobated errors of her religion.

If a great man is conspicuous for impiety and profaneness, his conduct will be attended with a most baneful influence. Soon will sycophants imitate his example, until irreligion becomes the fashion of the day, and everything sacred is trampled under foot. What an awful instance of such success have we in Jeroboam; who, the more effectually to detach from Judah the ten revolted tribes, erected idols in Dan and Bethel, which from that hour became, and ever afterwards remained, the objects of worship through the whole kingdom [[Hosea 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 5.11).] In this verse is mentioned not his success only, but the evil it brought upon them!] Hence he is continually stigmatized with the name of "him who made Israel to sin!" [[1 Kings 22:52](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 22.52).]

But indeed any enormous sinner, of whatever class, does much to destroy the peace and prosperity of his country. What is it that arms God against a nation, and provokes him to visit it with war, pestilence, and famine? Is it not sin? Every sinner therefore, in proportion as he increases the nation's guilt, contributes also to its punishment. In many instances we know, that the whole kingdom of Israel suffered for the offence of one; not for that of David only, who was the monarch [[2 Samuel 24:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 24.10); [2 Samuel 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 24.15).]; but for that also of Achan, an obscure individual [[Joshua 22:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 22.20).] Nor until the last day will it appear what injury this nation has sustained by means of every one here present.

II. One sinner destroys much good in FAMILIES—

What strife is brought into any house by an imperious husband, a contentious wife, or an undutiful, stubborn child! Instead of love and harmony, there is little else than brawling and quarreling; so that the very sight of each other, which ought to call forth all the tender emotions of their hearts excites nothing but enmity and disgust.

A man addicted to lewdness, gaming, intemperance, evil company, or idleness—to what wretchedness may he soon reduce his family! God has put a price into the hand of such an one to make his dependents happy, but he knows not how to use it [[Proverbs 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 17.16).] He might support them in ease and comfort, but brings them to poverty and desperation. How many instances of this are found in every town and village!

Nor can we easily estimate the good which a whisperer and a tale-bearer may destroy. Behold, he comes into a house where friends or relatives are cemented in the strictest bonds of union and amity; but he creates suspicion, and alienates their minds, and kindles feuds, and fills with animosity the bosoms that once glowed with mutual affection [[Proverbs 16:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 16.28).]

But what shall we say of the vile seducer, who under the mask of friendship enters the house of his unsuspecting neighbor, and avails himself of the opportunity to seduce his daughter, or to defile his wife? Alas! what incalculable misery does such a man create! For the sake of a momentary gratification, how many hearts does he pierce with the deepest and most lasting sorrow! What disgrace does he bring upon the whole family, involving the innocent with the guilty in irremediable shame, and bowing them down with grief that hurries them to the grave! Would to God that, if such a character exists in this assembly, he might be smitten with remorse, and wounded to his inmost soul!

III. One sinner destroys much good in the CHURCH of God—

On whom shall we fix our eyes, as hostile to the Church's welfare, so soon as on the self-serving minister? To him God has committed the improvement of the ordinances, and of the sacred oracles. To him he has given souls to be nurtured and disciplined for Heaven. But the deceiver is intent only on his own gains or pleasures. He performs his weekly task, not caring whether any are edified or not. He wastes the precious opportunities that can never be recalled; and, in the course of his ministry, he leads thousands to eternal perdition. Yes, as far as his influence extends, he makes null and void all the purposes of God's grace, and all the wonders of redeeming love.

When, humanly speaking, he might have been a blessing to the world, and an ornament to his profession, he brings his sacred function into reproach, scattering the flock whom he should have gathered, and destroying whom he should have saved. Such a one is Satan's best friend, and the greatest enemy of God and man.

Much good also may be destroyed, especially where men are awake to the concerns of religion, by a proud disputatious sectary. I speak not here of those who dissent from the Established Church, but of those who create divisions within the Church by unduly insisting on matters of minor importance, and of doubtful disputation. Though the sentiments of such a one are not fundamentally erroneous, yet if he is laying an undue stress on matters that are comparatively indifferent, and forming parties in the church, he distracts the minds of the simple; he puffs up many with pride; he loosens the bonds of brotherly affection; he weakens the hands of a pious minister, and he causes many to relapse into formality and indifference [[Romans 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 16.17-18).] Of such a character were Hymeneus [[2 Timothy 2:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.16-18); [2 Timothy 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 2.23); [2 Timothy 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 3.6); [2 Timothy 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 3.13).], and Alexander [2 Timothy 4:14-15.] One such root of bitterness will trouble and defile many [[Hebrews 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 12.15). See also [1 Corinthians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 5.2); [1 Corinthians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 5.6) and [Galatians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.7); [Galatians 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal 5.9).] On which account we should be as studious as possible to stop their growth [[Titus 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 1.13-14); [Titus 3:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 3.9-11).]

There is scarcely anyone in the universe who does greater injury to the Church, than the professor who walks dishonorably. One act of his brings disgrace upon the whole Church of God, and makes religion a stench in the very nostrils of those around him [[Genesis 34:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 34.30).] Instantly do the ungodly begin to triumph [[Psalm 35:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 35.19); [Psalm 35:25](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 35.25)], to arraign all the people of God as hypocrites, and to represent religion itself as a mask for everything that is vile [[2 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Pet 2.2).] Thus . . .  
the wicked are hardened,  
the weak are offended,  
the saints are dishonored, and  
the very name of God is blasphemed in the world [[1 Timothy 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.1).]

How does God himself complain of this in the case of David [[2 Samuel 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Sam 12.14).]! and how incalculable must the evil be, when multitudes are thus offended, and set against the very means of salvation!

There is yet one more character that we shall mention, whose conduct indeed is less extensively destructive, but not less injurious to those within his sphere, we mean, the scoffer. He brings no disgrace upon religion, because he makes no profession of it. Nor can he greatly impede its progress in the world, because he is not invested with authority or influence. But perhaps there is some relation, some friend, whom he can discourage by sneers and ridicule, if not also by menaces and actual unkindness. Suppose then that, in one single instance, he succeeds in breaking the bruised reed and quenching the smoking flax; who shall appreciate the good he has destroyed? to ruin one for whom Christ died; and who, but for such an obstacle, would have got safe to Heaven [[Romans 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 14.15).] If the whole world be of no value in comparison of a soul [[Matthew 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 16.26).], then, in that single act, the scoffer has done more harm than the whole world can recompense.

Application—

1. Let us guard against receiving evil from others—

It was a heathen poet who said, "Bad company corrupts good character" and from him the Apostle quotes it, for the edification of the Church of Christ [[1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 15.33).] Behold then what reason itself, as well as Scripture, teaches us in reference to the subject before us. One person infected with the plague may do us more injury than a hundred healthy people can do us good. I would earnestly entreat all, therefore, and young people especially, not to admit to their friendship so much as one associate, whose ways are evil. For who can tell to what an extent the principles and conduct of such a man may prevail to efface the good impressions that have been made upon his mind, and to induce habits that may prove fatal to his soul? If I regarded nothing but your temporal prosperity, I would give this advice: but when I take eternity into the account, I cannot but urge it upon every one here present, and say with the Apostle, "Come out from among such people altogether, and be separate from them, and do not so much as touch the unclean thing" or person that may contaminate your soul.

2. Let us to the utmost of our power repair the evil which we ourselves have done—

Suppose us ever so free from the more flagrant instances that have been mentioned, there is not one among us who has not done much evil by means of his example. We have all lived, like the world around us, in a neglect of God and of our own souls: and, in so doing, have countenanced the same conduct in others. Thus, whether we intended it or not, we have confirmed many in their ungodly ways, and have contributed to their eternal ruin. Let us go now, and undo what we have done: alas! we cannot find one half of them: many are not known by us: many are gone to distant parts: many are already in the eternal world: and, if we should attempt to convert those to whom we can get access, they would laugh at us as fools, or despise us as hypocrites.

Besides, all of them in their respective spheres have diffused the contagion which they received from us: and thus have put it beyond the reach of man to trace, or even to conceive, the evil we have done. And does not all this call for penitence? Yes, if our "head were a fountain of tears to run down incessantly" to the last hour of our lives, it would be no more than the occasion calls for. But with our penitence we must unite our utmost efforts to repair the evil we have done.

To repair it with respect to God, is the work of Christ only. He alone can render satisfaction for our sins; his blood alone can cleanse us from the guilt we have contracted by them.

But with respect to man we may do something, though we cannot do all that we could wish. Let us begin with our example: this speaks the most forcibly, and the most extensively. Let us, by giving up ourselves to God, show others what they ought to do: and let our light so shine before men, that they may be constrained to glorify God, and to take shame to themselves.

Next, let us use our influence: be it small or great, let us not neglect to exert it, that by every means in our power we may counteract our past evils, and stir up others to flee from the wrath to come.

Finally, let us be fervent in our intercessions at the throne of grace, that God may take to him his great power, and establish his kingdom upon earth. Let us particularly pray for those, whom, in any respect, we may have allured from the path of duty. Thus, like the great Apostle, we shall make some compensation to the world for all the injuries it has sustained by our means, and show, that, if one sinner can destroy much good, one saint can effect much which shall be a ground of joy and gratitude to all eternity.

Liberality Encouraged

**[Ecclesiastes 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 11.1)**, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days."

While, in the purity of its precepts, the inspired volume exceeds all other books upon the face of the earth—it excels all other compositions in the variety and richness of the images under which it exhibits our duty and urges the performance of it.

The image under which liberality is here inculcated is well understood in countries where the heat of the climate, uniting with periodical inundations, enables the gardener to proceed in a mode of agriculture unknown to us in the colder regions of the globe. In Egypt, for instance, where the Nile overflows the country periodically to a vast extent, it is common for men to cast their seed, their rice especially, upon the waters, while yet they are at a considerable depth. This might seem to be folly in the extreme, but experience proves, that, instead of losing their seed, they find it again, after many days, rising into an abundant crop.

Such shall be the return which we also shall find to our efforts, if we exert ourselves,

I. For the relief of men's bodily needs—

Liberality to the poor is strongly insisted on in the Holy Scriptures. It is inculcated,

1. Liberality is inculcated in the way of PRECEPT—

Exceedingly clear and strong were the injunctions which God gave on this subject to his people of old [See [Deuteronomy 15:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 15.7-11).] So, under the New Testament dispensation, we are enjoined to "labor with our own hands." And "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up," for the purpose of relieving others [[Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph 4.28). [1 Corinthians 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Cor 16.2).] Nay, so obvious is this duty, that the man who lives not in the practice of it must be an utter stranger to the love of God in his soul [[1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.17).] For "if he loves not his brother whom he has seen, then how can he love God whom he has not seen? [[1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 4.20).]

2. Liberality is inculcated in the way of EXAMPLE—

The good Samaritan shows us how we ought to exercise generosity, even towards those who, by reason of particular differences and distinctions, may appear to be most remote from us [[Luke 10:33-37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 10.33-37).]

The widow, in giving her mite, which was all that she possessed, might be thought to have acted an extravagant part, especially when she gave it for a purpose to which it could bear no proportion, namely, the repairing of the temple. Yet is that commended to us, by our Lord himself, as an example highly to be admired, and universally to be followed [[Mark 12:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark 12.42-43).]

As for the Macedonians, who were proposed as an example to the Corinthians, their generosity exceeded all belief: for when in great affliction, and in a state of deep poverty, they abounded unto the riches of liberality, and of their own selves, without any solicitation on the part of the Apostle, besought him with much entreaty to take upon him the distribution of their alms [[2 Corinthians 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 8.1-4).] Nothing can give us a higher idea of the excellence of charity than this.

3. Liberality is inculcated in the way of ENCOURAGEMENT—

God assures us, that "whatever we give to the poor, we lend unto the Lord; and that he will, in one way or another, repay us [[Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 19.17).] He will repay us, even in a way of temporal prosperity: for the giving of the first-fruits of all our increase to the poor is the way, not to empty our barns, but to fill them with plenty, and to make our presses burst out with new wine [[Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 3.9-10).]

Still more will he repay us in a way of spiritual prosperity; since, "if we draw out our soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, he will satisfy our souls in drought, and make fat our bones, and make us like a watered garden, or like a spring of water, whose waters fail not [[Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 58.10-11).]

Even with eternal rewards will he repay us, "recompensing, at the resurrection of the just," the smallest services we have rendered his people [[Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 14.14)], and not allowing "even a cup of cold water to be left without its appropriate reward [[Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 10.42).]

I say then, with assured confidence in reference to this matter, "Cast your seed upon the waters; and you shall find it after many days."

But we may understand our text as encouraging our exertions also,

II. For the advancement of men's MENTAL improvement—

To this the same image is applied by the prophet Isaiah; who gives us this additional information, that people, previous to their casting of their seed upon the waters, send forth their oxen and their donkeys to tread the ground with their feet, in order the better to prepare the earth for its reception: "Blessed are you who sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the donkey [[Isaiah 32:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 32.20).]

Now this refers to the publication of the Gospel in every place, however untoward the circumstances, or hopeless the appearance. And we can bear witness to the truth of the prophet's observation: for in many places, and on many hearts, where there has been as little prospect of success as could well be conceived, God has given efficacy to the word of his grace; and the handful of corn sown upon the top of the mountains has sprung up, so that the fruit thereof has shaken like the woods of Lebanon; and those of the city where it has been cast have flourished like the piles of grass upon the earth [[Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 72.16).]

To "child care and training for the poor", for the promotion of which I now more immediately address you, the text is peculiarly applicable; since nothing can be supposed more hopeless than any attempt to benefit the rising generation, from the ages of two to five or six. But I must say, that, if you cast your seed upon these waters, you shall find it again, in very abundant benefits conferred on all the poorer classes of society.

What a relief is it to the mother to have her infants duly attended to through the day; while she, instead of having her hands tied by the care of them, is enabled to earn bread for their support! What a benefit, too, is it to her elder daughter; who would otherwise have her time occupied in attending upon her younger brothers and sisters, and be thereby deprived of education for herself, while she was discharging that important office! This is of immense importance, because it secures to all the children of the poor the same advantages; the elder and the younger being alike partakers of the benefits thus freely accorded to them.

But to the children themselves the benefits are incalculably great. We cannot but have seen, times without number, what depraved habits are contracted by the children of the poor when playing about the streets or lanes of a town without control. At home, for the most part, they see nothing but evil; and abroad, they practice it in every way with sad proficiency, lying, swearing, quarreling, the very pests of the neighborhood wherein they dwell. As for anything good, they learn it not; having no good principles instilled into them, and no good examples set before them.

But by being brought into a school at the early age of two or three years, they are kept from all those temptations to which they would otherwise be exposed; and have . . .  
their conduct watched over,  
their tempers corrected,  
their habits restrained,  
their principles improved,  
their whole deportment brought into subjection to good instruction and to well-ordered authority. They are insensibly taught, by the example of others, what could not have been infused into them by mere abstract precept; and they acquire, by imitation, habits of order and docility, which they could not by any other method have obtained.

Now, then, who shall estimate the value of this to the children themselves? Or who shall say, What benefit shall, in a course of years, arise to the whole community from such institutions as these, if they be generally established and well supported?

I have not spoken respecting religious advantages accruing to the children, because it may be supposed that they are not at that early age capable of religious instruction. But is it nothing, to prevent the soil being overrun with briars and thorns, and to have it improved by the infusion of moral principles? In fact, a child's religion consists chiefly in the fear of God, and in a habitual regard to his all-seeing eye. This is implanted in their minds to vast advantage, by the entire system of discipline to which they are subjected, as well as by the distinct instructions which are given them. And though it is but too probable that they may afterwards lose the impressions which are then made upon their minds, yet they can never forget the general idea, that it was well with them when they were so disciplined and so instructed.

Nor is the influence which they may carry home a trifling matter: for when their parents hear them giving an account of the lessons they have learned—lessons of meekness and patience, of truth and honesty, of purity and love—they may themselves be put to shame, and acquire very important hints for their own improvement.

I beg permission, then, to recommend to your support this important institution—

I would recommend it,

First, for the sake of the rising generation, on whom it will confer so great a benefit.

Next, for the sake of those who have set on foot this benevolent plan. None but people of very enlarged minds could ever have devised such means of benefitting the poor. To instruct such infants would, to any common understanding, have appeared as hopeless a task as that of "casting bread upon the waters." Yet experience has proved its vast utility; and shown, that if such institutions were to prevail in every town, a most extensive benefit would be conferred on the whole community!

Shall, then, people capable of adorning and instructing the highest ranks in society not meet with support, when they employ their talents in contriving means for benefitting the poor? Surely every person ought to bear testimony to the worth and excellence of such designs; and to give them, the beat tribute of applause, their active concurrence, and their most liberal support.

Lastly, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, I would urge upon you the support of this beneficent institution: for he counted not little children beneath his notice; but took them up in his arms, and put his hands upon them and blessed them, and declared that every attention that was paid to such infants would be regarded by him as paid to himself [[Matthew 18:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.2); [Matthew 18:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 18.5).]

If, then, you have any love to the Savior, who himself assumed a state of infancy for you—yes, and died upon the cross for you—then show it by your liberality on this occasion. Let all endeavor to cultivate the ground. Let him that has an ox, "send forth his ox;" and let him that has a donkey, "send forth his donkey." Let every one, according to his ability, contribute to help forward this good work, without intermission and without despondency. To everyone among you I would say, "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well." [Ecclesiastes 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 11.6)

Youth Warned of the Future Judgment

**[Ecclesiastes 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 11.9)**, "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment!"

Earthly pleasure is doubtless gratifying to flesh and blood: hence it is more or less an object of desire to all. But there are two considerations which may well abate our ardor in the pursuit, namely, that its gratifications will soon come to an end; and that there is an approaching judgment, at which we must give an account of all that we have ever done in the body, and receive from God's mouth a sentence corresponding with the tenor of our past life.

In the verses preceding our text, the former consideration is urged; and we are told, that, however protracted our pleasures may be, they are but like a winter's sun, which will soon set in darkness, and be followed by a long and dreary night. Such a night is not far off, even from those who are in the very morning of life. It may be hastened prematurely, as it were, by sickness, and toil, and unavoidable misfortunes; and it must come at last through the infirmities of old age, which, if our life be prolonged, will make it but "labor and sorrow." The latter consideration is suggested in the text, which contains two things:

I. A keen remonstrance.

The address here made to youth, though it appears like a concession, is not really so—

It has been thought by some to be a concession, recommending youth to enjoy themselves in the world—only to do it in such a way as not to endanger their happiness in the future life. And it is certain that there are in this book many concessions to that effect [[Ecclesiastes 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 2.24); [Ecclesiastes 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 3.12-13); [Ecclesiastes 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 5.18-19).]

Such passages as these may indeed be easily pressed too far: but, on the other hand, they are not in general understood by the religious world.

Religious people are apt to imagine that Christianity requires an utter abandonment of those things which the carnal mind affects; and that a pious person who possesses any considerable measure of earthly comforts, is necessarily inconsistent in his conduct. But this is a mistake, and a mistake which greatly needs to be rectified; because it occasions many unjust censures, and uncharitable reflections. "God has given us all things richly to enjoy [[1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 6.17).] And, provided we do not spend an undue portion of our substance on earthly indulgences, or set our affections upon them—there is nothing in Christianity which prohibits a reasonable use, and a temperate enjoyment of them. If only we sit loose to them in our hearts, and enjoy God in them, they are perfectly lawful; yes, "they are sanctified to us by the word of God and prayer" [[1 Timothy 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Tim 4.4-5).]

But it is not in this sense that the address before us is to be understood:

It is, on the contrary, a just and severe remonstrance—

The terms here used are such as cannot well be taken in a good sense. To "walk in the ways of our own heart, and in the sight of our own eyes," is equivalent to walking in the ways of criminal self-indulgence. This is the import of these expressions in other passages of Scripture [[Numbers 15:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Num 15.39). [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deut 29.19).] And so they must be taken here; as is evident from the awful judgments with which such indulgences are threatened in out text. The text is, in fact, an ironical remonstrance, similar to that which Elijah uttered, when he condemned the worshipers of Baal, "Cry aloud; for he is a God [[1 Kings 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 18.27).] And that by which Micaiah reproved the impolicy of Ahab; "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper" [[1 Kings 22:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 Kings 22.15).]

By this kind of irony Solomon intended to convey an idea, that young men are bent on such indulgences; that they promise themselves security in the midst of them; and that they will not be prevailed on by more temperate reproof. In this view, his words may be thus paraphrased: "You will, notwithstanding all that I can say to dissuade you from it, go on in the ways of sin, persuading yourselves that nothing but happiness awaits you. Therefore go on, and follow the bent of your own inclinations—but know, that in the end you will find yourselves grievously disappointed!"

Severe as such a remonstrance is, it is perfectly just; for, who that considers what the great end of our being is, can doubt the wickedness of living to the world and to the flesh? Or who that sees how contrary such conduct is to that of Christ and his apostles, can doubt what the issue of such a life shall be? Truly, "if we mind earthly things, we are enemies to the cross of Christ, and our end will be destruction!" [[Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil 3.18-19).] For, whatever may be said or thought to the contrary, "to be carnally-minded is death" [[Romans 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 8.6).]

To this is annexed,

II. A solemn warning—

There is a day of judgment fast approaching—

God will most assuredly "judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, even by his Son, Jesus Christ." Before his tribunal we must all appear. The young, as well as the old, shall then give up their account to him. The things which we did in the earlier part of life shall be brought forth for judgment, as well as those which were done at a more advanced age. The book of God's remembrance shall be opened; and everything that was recorded in it, from the first moment of our existence to the last breath we drew, shall be adduced as illustrative of our true character, and as the ground of God's final sentence.

Then shall the things which are now done receive their proper reward—

The judgment of God will not then be regulated by our views, but by his own unerring wisdom. We may excuse a life of vanity and worldliness now; but he will view it as indeed it is—a life of rebellion against him. It argues a total alienation of heart from him. It shows that we lived to please ourselves rather than him, and that we were in reality a God unto ourselves.

He had told us plainly, "If you live after the flesh, you shall die," but we would not believe it. He had told us, that "the broad road, in which the many are walking, leads to destruction; and that the narrow way alone leads unto life." But we would not be persuaded that such an awful declaration should ever be verified. Nevertheless so it will be found in the last day. Of this we may be perfectly assured: for it stands on the word of God, which is as immutable as God himself: "Know that for all these things, God will call you into judgment."

Application—

1. Those who seek their happiness in earthly things—

Do not say that you commit no gross sin, and therefore have no cause to fear. The question simply is, "Do you walk after the way of your own heart?" If you do, it matters little what path you choose, whether it is that of open sin, or secret sin—you are equally living without God in the world, and are equally obnoxious to his holy displeasure. I mean not by this to say that all sins are alike, or that gross immoralities will not augment your guilt and condemnation in the last day. But this is an undoubted truth, that he alone who gives up himself to God in this world, can ever dwell with him in the world to come. For "if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption: and it is only from sowing to the Spirit, that we can hope to reap life everlasting."

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we would persuade you, while yet we may avert from you the impending storm. We would persuade you in particular, O young man, that you may not any longer deceive your soul, and dream of happiness in the eternal world, when you are only "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath."

2. Those who are seeking happiness in the ways of God—

Say whether you have not found more solid joy in the ways of God, than ever you found in the vanities of the world? Say whether you have not found it better to "mortify your members upon earth," than to indulge them; and to live to God, rather than to live unto yourself?

The joy you now have is legitimate: it is such as prophets and apostles had before you; and such as God has freely conceded to you, to the utmost extent of all your wishes, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Indeed your present joys are the gift of God to your soul. Go on then "rejoicing in the Lord always," yes, rejoice, if so it may be, "with a joy that is unspeakable and glorified." These joys will never make the future judgment formidable; on the contrary, they will help to prepare you for it, inasmuch as they are themselves a pledge of your everlasting inheritance.

Remembering God in Our Youth

**[Ecclesiastes 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 12.1)**, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say: I find no pleasure in them."

Instruction may profitably be given in a variety of ways. Indeed, in order to be effectual, it must be accommodated in some measure to the dispositions and habits of the people addressed. To one who is wayward and self-willed, the pungency of irony may be well applied. While with the tractable and docile, the more simple and direct way of affectionate exhortation may be of more avail. Both of these methods are adopted by Solomon in the passage before us. In the verses immediately preceding our text, he addresses a young man whom he supposes to be bent on the prosecution of his evil ways: "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment!"

Then, after a serious admonition to avoid the evils which ungovernable passions will certainly bring upon him, he affectionately exhorts him to devote his early life to the exercises of true piety.

I. What is implied in "remembering our Creator"—

Of course, it cannot be supposed that it is a mere act of the memory which is here recommended, but such a remembrance as befits the relation in which we stand to him as his creatures. We should remember then,

1. His AUTHORITY over us—

As the work of his hands, we have received from him all our abilities, whether of mind or body. It is of his bounty alone that we have been endowed with the faculty of reason, which elevates us above all the rest of this lower world, and brings us into a near conformity with that higher order of created intelligences, the holy angels. For what purpose has he thus distinguished us, but that we might render him services worthy both of our present state, and our future destinies. "He has formed us for himself, that we might show forth his praise." This is the end for which we are to live: nor is anything on earth to divert us from the course which he has marked out for us. Obedience, it is true, is due to our parents, and to all others whom the providence of God has placed over us. But the authority of the creature must always be regarded as subordinate to that of our Creator; and, if at any time the will of man stands opposed to the will of God, we must then reply, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you."

Whatever solicitations we may have from without or from within to violate any part of God's revealed will, we must withstand them manfully, and resist them even unto death. Knowing that "we are not our own, but God's; we must glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."

2. The COMMANDS he has given us—

We will not here enter into the different commandments of the law, but draw your attention rather to that great commandment of the Gospel to believe in Christ: "This is his commandment," says John, "that you believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ [[1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.23).] This command should be had in constant remembrance. It is addressed to every child of man. There is no one so innocent, as not to need a Savior; nor any one so guilty, but that he may, through penitence and faith, obtain a saving interest in that Savior, whom God has provided for a ruined world.

Do not imagine, my young friends, that you are not concerned in this, or that it will be time enough for you to attend to it, when you shall feel a greater need of mercy. You all are sinners. You all have a consciousness within yourselves that you have done many things which you ought not, and left undone many things which you ought to have done. You therefore have in your own bosoms a witness that you need a Savior. As in the presence of the Most High God, I declare unto you, that there is no mercy for the young, any more than for the old, but in the name, and through the mediation, of Jesus Christ, "there is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ."

Go then to this Savior, and implore mercy at his hands. Look to him as dying for your sins, and "as reconciling you to God by the blood of his cross." Let every one of you from day to day wash in the fountain of his blood, and clothe yourselves with the robe of his unspotted righteousness, and live altogether upon his fullness, receiving out of it continual supplies of all needful grace.

3. His CONTINUAL PRESENCE with us—

"God is in every place, beholding the evil and the good," and wherever you are, you should see, as it were, this inscription written, "You see me, O God!" [[Genesis 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen 16.13).] This is a point which you should never forget for one single moment: for it is only by bearing this in mind that you will be kept from the indulgence of secret sins. When no human eye is upon us, we are apt to think that we may give a greater latitude to our conduct. But we should remember that the darkness is no darkness with God, but the night and the day to him are both alike. "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."

Oh, if you bear this in remembrance, you will never do what you know to be wrong, nor utter what you know to be false. You will act in all things as in the immediate presence of your God, and will do nothing but what you believe to be good and acceptable in his sight.

4. His determination to JUDGE us in the last day—

God "has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, even by his Son Jesus Christ." In that day all shall be summoned to his judgment-seat, the old and the young, the rich and the poor. Not one that has ever been born into the world shall then be absent—the child that died at birth, as well as the man of a hundred years old, shall be summoned to receive his everlasting doom, according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. To those who have lived to your age, judgment or mercy will be dispensed according as you have remembered or forgotten God.

Most solemn is that declaration of the Psalmist, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God [[Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 9.17).] If you have forgotten his authority over you, and especially his command to believe in his Son Jesus Christ; if you have forgotten that his eye was always upon you, inspecting your most secret thoughts, and noting them down in order to his future judgment; and if you have lived without any concern about the irreversible sentence that shall then be passed upon you; it will indeed be an awful day to you, a commencement of such misery as no words can describe, nor any imagination conceive. Remember then that God marks down in the book of his remembrance your every act, and every word, and every thought; and that it is your wisdom so to live, that, whether called at an earlier or later period of life, you may give up your account to him with joy, and not with grief.

Such is the duty of all without exception, but the text requires me more particularly to show,

II. WHY we should thus remember him in early life—

It were easy to accumulate reasons on so plain a point: but we shall content ourselves with assigning a few of the most obvious;

1. This is the most FAVORABLE time—

It is of the nature of sin to harden the heart and to sear the conscience. Therefore the less we have been habituated to sin, the more hope there is that a good impression may be made upon our minds. We cannot agree with those who represent the hearts of youth as a sheet of white paper, on which you may write either good or evil. For, alas! there is evil, not merely written, but inscribed there in a most abundant measure, and in characters that are almost indelible. Yet we cordially accede to this truth, that the young are as yet only like plants sprouting from the earth—pliable and easy to be trained; while at a more advanced age they become like trees, which retain their form, unyielding, and unmoved.

From the very employments too of men in more advanced life, there arise many disadvantages: being drawn to a more vigorous pursuit of earthly things, they are frequently, so oppressed with "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, that the good seed which has been sown in them, cannot grow up unto perfection."

But from these things young people are comparatively free. Besides, at this season they have an express promise from God, which they cannot plead in future life [[Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 8.17),] and therefore in a variety of views they may well consider this as "the most convenient season" for piety that can ever occur.

2. It may, for anything we know, be the ONLY time that shall be allotted us—

The youngest and the healthiest among us may be speedily removed. Let any one survey the grave-stones that surround him, and he will see that multitudes have been cut off at his age, though once they appeared as likely to live as any who have survived him. And what if disease or accident arrests you before you have truly devoted yourselves to God? Will you have any opportunity to repair your error in the grave? "Is there any work or device there," by which you can accomplish what here was left undone? No! "As the tree falls, so it lies:" and as you die, in a converted or unconverted state, so you must remain forever! "Today then, while it is called today," harden not your hearts," as the generality, alas! are but too prone to do.

3. No other thing in the universe can so contribute to our present happiness—

It is a great mistake and folly, to imagine that happiness can be found in the vanities of time and sense. From infallible authority we can declare that everything under the sun is mere "vanity and vexation of spirit." But in the service of God there is real joy. His ways are all, without exception, "ways of pleasantness and peace," and "in keeping his commandments there is great reward."

Ask anyone whether he ever regretted that he had given himself up to God too soon? We have heard of men, even of good men, as Job and Jeremiah, cursing the day of their birth—but who ever cursed the day of his new birth? At every period of life this is a subject that will bear reflection and impart delight—and in proportion as we grow in piety will our joy in God be increased.

4. There will certainly come a time when we shall wish we had sought the Lord in early life—

The text speaks of "evil days as coming"—and sooner or later they are coming to all.

There is a time of sickness or old age coming, "wherein we shall have no pleasure" in earthly things: and shall we not then wish, that we had sought the Lord in our youth? Shall we then look back with pleasure on the sins that we have committed, or on the vanities that have kept us from God? Nothing but the consolations of God will then be of any avail to make us happy amidst the evils, which, from pain or debility, we shall have to sustain.

But there is a time of death also which we must meet—and what will be our thoughts at that period? Then it will be of little moment to us what joys or sorrows we have met with in our former life. All our concern will be about our eternal state. Oh! with what force will that question press upon the mind, "Am I ready? Am I prepared to meet God?"

How different will our feelings then be, according as we have given up ourselves to God in our early youth, or put off the work of our souls to a dying hour! and what an unfit season will that be to begin that work!

Go one step farther: follow the soul into the eternal world, and view it standing at the judgment-seat of Christ. What will be its feelings at that day? I need not say—your own consciences will tell you. At this moment, even though you choose not to live the life of the righteous, you are saying inwardly in your hearts, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Then, as these times must come, let us work while it is day, knowing assuredly, that the night is coming when no man can work, and when we shall bitterly lament, that ever we lost this day of our visitation, and neglected the things belonging to our everlasting peace.

Application—

1. The younger part of our audience—

"Now" therefore more particularly "remember God." Remember, that he sees the way in which you perform this duty. He sees whether you endeavor truly to approve yourselves to him, or whether you only mock him by a thoughtless compliance with an established form. Go to him, and surrender up yourselves wholly to him, as "the first-fruits of his creatures," and you will have reason to bless God to all eternity, that ever you were called to perform this solemn service.

But, if you go without any sincere desire to devote yourselves to him, you will only harden your own hearts, and increase the guilt you have already contracted. "Let me however hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." Yes, dearly Beloved, we will hope, respecting some of you at least, that we "have not bestowed upon you labor in vain."

2. To those who have grown to manhood—

Every argument used with the young, presses with additional weight on you, and says, with greatly augmented force, "Remember NOW your Creator." If in your earlier days you were led to comply with this advice, I will venture to ask, Do you repent of having done so? Is not the chief matter of your regret, that you did not give yourselves up to him at a yet earlier period, and that you have not adhered more steadfastly to the engagements you entered into? If you have, on the contrary, advanced in the Divine life, and grown from babes to young men, or from young men to fathers—does not that afford you matter of very exalted joy?

Go on then, "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is ahead," and know that, "when the days arrive in which you shall say, you have no pleasure in them," you shall experience "a joy with which the stranger intermeddles not;" which this world can neither give nor take away; and which shall be to you a pledge and earnest of everlasting felicity in the bosom of your God.

The Sum of All True Religion

**[Ecclesiastes 12:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eccles 12.13-14)**, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

In this book of Ecclesiastes are many things difficult to be understood, and capable of being perverted by any one who desires to justify himself in an undue attachment to the world. But a reference to the condition of the author will enable us to explain the whole in a satisfactory and consistent manner. Solomon was possessed of all that this world could afford; and he rendered every object, and every employment, subservient to his own comfort. In all this he sinned not. It was not in the use of God's creatures that he sinned, but in the abuse of them. And we also may both possess and enjoy all that God in his providence has allotted to us, if only we enjoy God in the creature, and have earth subordinated to Heaven. What the real drift of all his observations was, is told to us in the words which we have just read, and which give us a clew to all that he has before spoken. In them we see,

I. The sum of all moral and religious instructions—

Many things we have to say both on the subject of morals and of religion, but they are all comprehended in this one saying, "Fear God, and keep his commandments."

In this is contained the **whole substance of religion**—

By the fear of God we understand, not a slavish dread of him, but a holy filial regard, arising from a sense of his relation to us as a reconciled God and Father.

And in "keeping his commandments" we include a due attention to that great commandment of the Gospel, the believing in our Lord Jesus Christ for salvation [[1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.23).] We must distinguish carefully between a legal and an evangelical interpretation of these terms, lest we confound the Gospel with the Law. We must guard especially against a reliance on our obedience, as if it could in any way, or in any degree, purchase salvation for us. But, if we are duly jealous on these points, we need never be afraid of asserting, that all true religion is comprehended in the duties inculcated in our text. Everything else is subservient to these things: the most important principles are of little use, except as they conduce to this end. It was for this that the Lord Jesus Christ undertook and executed the whole work of redemption, "To this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living," [[Romans 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 14.9)] and "purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works" [[Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus 2.14).] All the promises of the Gospel are given to us for this end, to "make us partakers of the Divine nature," [2 Peter 1:4] that we may, under their gracious influence, "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God" [[2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Cor 7.1).] In a word, it is this which is the scope and end of all our ministrations; we are sent "to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God [[Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 26.18).]

In this all is contained that deserves the attention of a rational being—

It is of very small consequence whether we have more or less of this world—its pleasures, riches, honors, are but for a moment. What enjoyment has the Rich Man now of all his sumptuous fare? What sense has Lazarus of all his former wants? All is passed away; and nothing remains of all the good or evil that befell them in this world, but a responsibility for the use they made of it.

The period allotted for the enjoyment of earthly things is but a day, an hour, a moment. What does it signify to a man acting a play, whether he performs the part of a king or a beggar? Whatever his real character is, that he assumes, and that he retains, as soon as the last scene has ended. So the only thing that is of importance to us is, "What is that character which we shall sustain to all eternity? Have we been rebellious and disobedient? or have we feared God and wrought righteousness?" Those are the points that will determine our future destinies; and therefore they are the only points deserving of any serious regard.

But this leads us more particularly to notice,

II. The consideration that gives to it all its weight and importance—

This will be the one point of inquiry at the last day—

God will come to judge the world; and, when examining the state of every individual, he will not ask, What sect we were of; or, What our sentiments and professions were; but, What our practice was, and What the habit of our minds towards him? I may even say, that that which passes under the name of Christian experience, will be of no account, as distinct from the duties inculcated in our text. It is radical and universal holiness alone, that God values: and, if that be right in its principle and end, it is the only thing which will be regarded in God's estimate of our character. In a word, it is "the whole of man;" it is his whole duty, and his whole happiness. His whole duty, as comprehending universal holiness; and his whole happiness, as being really a foretaste of Heaven itself.

According to this will our eternal state be fixed—

Some of this will appear in our external conduct, but some will be found only in the internal habit of the mind; because there is very rarely scope for discovering in outward act, all that the grace of God will discover from in the heart. "Every secret thing" therefore, every secret desire, purpose, inclination, appetite, affection, will go to the forming of God's estimate, and the determining the measure of our future recompense. If these have been evil, the best acts will have lost their value. But if these have been good, the smallest acts that can possibly have been performed, the widow's mite, or a cup of cold water given to a disciple, will be ranked among the most acceptable services, and be acknowledged as such by God himself. If we have really had "the fear of God in our hearts," and "walked in his fear all the day long," and, under the influence of that principle, labored to approve ourselves to him in all things—then we shall assuredly hear him say to us in that day, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!"

This subject will be of the greatest use,

1. To correct the errors of those who affect superior light—

Many there are who leave out all practical godliness from their system, They can think of nothing but God's eternal decrees, and of the finished work of Christ for us; forgetting that there still remains a work for him to accomplish in us. They would account all such views as have been presented to you, legal, and unfit to be offered to a Christian auditory. What Solomon accounted "the conclusion of the whole matter," and "the whole of man," they account as nothing. But not so did Peter, who says that "in every nation, he who fears God and works righteousness, is accepted of him [[Acts 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 10.35).] Nor was Paul of their opinion; for he has declared (and in the very epistle where he most enlarges on the decrees of God), that it is "by patient continuance in well-doing we must attain to glory and honor and immortality [[Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 2.7), with 2 Corinthians 5:10-11.]

We do not hesitate to say, that if an angel from Heaven were to be sent to preach the Gospel, the statements before given would constitute a very principal part of his ministrations. John in his visions saw an angel flying through the whole world, to carry the everlasting Gospel to people of all nations and tongues: and the words in which he addressed the whole human race were like those of our text, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come!" [[Revelation 14:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 14.6-7).]

Here is the very exhortation of Solomon, enforced with the identical consideration which he urges; and it is expressly called, "The everlasting Gospel." Let those who affect a higher and superior tone be convinced of their mistake. Let them bring forward all the sublimest truths of Christianity in their place; but let "this be the conclusion of the whole matter;" for, whether they will believe it or not, this is "the one thing needful," and "the whole duty of man."

2. To dispel the fears of those whose knowledge is yet dim—

As there are many who delight in nothing but the deepest mysteries of our religion, so there are many who make those mysteries an occasion of continual disquietude. The doctrines of predestination and election are ever present with their minds, as grounds of terror and despondency. They cannot see that they are of the number of God's elect; and therefore they imagine that all exertions on their part are in vain. But the fears of this people are such as ought no longer to be indulged: for there is no man in the universe who is authorized to consider himself as one of God's elect, any farther than he has "the spot of God's children" upon him. It is by his fear of God, and his obedience to God's commandments, that he must judge of his state before God. To judge of his election by any other standard, is only to deceive his own soul. If then those who distress themselves about the doctrines of election would dismiss those subjects from their minds, and contemplate only what is more within the sphere of their comprehension, they would do well.

Let me recommend this plan to all. Look not at God's decrees, which you can never explore, but at the visible effects of his grace upon your souls. If you can find "the works of faith, and labors of love, and patience of hope" evidenced in your conduct, you may from thence assuredly infer "your election of God" [1 Thessalonians 1:3-4.] since those are indisputably the fruits of his grace: and his grace has been communicated according to his purpose, which "he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began" [[2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2 Tim 1.9). [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 31.3).]

3. To regulate the conduct of those whose views are scriptural and just—

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" [[Psalm 111:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 111.10).] and to get this in a more uniform and abiding exercise, is to be the one object of our lives. It is the beginning and "the conclusion of the whole matter." O that this were better understood among us!

An old writer observes, that religion consists not in Notions, but Motions. The observation, though quaint, is true. The difference is not always visible at first sight, and the one if often mistaken for the other; but, if separated, they are as wide asunder as Heaven and Hell. Let it never be forgotten, that holiness of heart and life is that which constitutes our fitness for Heaven; and that it is only by growth in that, that we can ever honor God on earth, or secure the enjoyment of him in the eternal world.

SONG OF SOLOMON

N.B. In the expositions below, Simeon holds the traditional view that the "Song of Songs" is an allegory of the love relationship between Jesus and the redeemed church (or between Jesus and the true believer). In this view:

The "Bridegroom" is Jesus.

His "Spouse" is the redeemed church (or the true believer).

The "sons" and "daughters" are those who yet lie in darkness and the shadow of death; or, at best, have only "the form of godliness, without the power."

The "daughters of Jerusalem" are professors of religion, who, though friendly on the whole, are not yet brought into this near relation to Christ, nor made partakers of his saving benefits.

The following is from the Reformation Heritage Study Bible:

The Song of Solomon is given by the Spirit of God to stir up the affections of believers, whether of the Old Testament or of the New, to seek to cultivate secret communion with Christ in prayer and in all the other means of grace. Such spiritual delight was enjoyed by such Old Testament saints as Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. This book uses the language of love to draw Christians to yearn for experiences in our heart of assurance, joy, and rapture of soul as we taste something of Christ's love for us, even here in this world.

Although believers, symbolized by the fair young woman ([Song 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.8)), have weaknesses and sins ([Song 5:2–3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.2â3)), they genuinely love Jesus as Lord and Savior and yearn for a taste of His love as something "better than wine" ([Song 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.2)). This book uses the language of physical beauty to express the mutual delight that Christ and the believer have one in the other. This delight will be consummated one day in Heaven, when Christ will at long last present His church to Himself as "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" ([Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27)). So this lovely book aims to stir up Christians to seek communion now with Christ and to yearn for His second coming in glory.

The inward delights that a true believer may at times enjoy exceed the pleasures that worldly men find in such material things as "wine" ([Song 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.2)). The pleasures of believers are not sensual but spiritual, and they are poured into their hearts by Christ, whom they love.

Christ's presence is not felt by the believer at all times in the same measure of intensity. At times the believer senses that Jesus has "withdrawn himself" ([Song 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.6)). At such times he or she earnestly seeks once again for the felt presence of Christ. When Jesus again draws near, the believer's soul is like "the chariots of Ammi-nadib" ([Song 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 6.12))—alive with excitement and energy to live and fight for our blessed Lord.

The best experiences of Christ's love in this world are all too short. The souls of the saints yearn for the day when their Lord will come at last in all His glory to lift them from the grave and bestow endless divine affection upon them. The Song ends fitly with the anguished cry, "Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices" ([Song 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 8.14)). The Bible voices this same yearning cry as it closes: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" ([Revelation 22:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.20)).

#848

THE CHURCH'S LOVE TO CHRIST

**[Song of Songs 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.3-4)**

"Your name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love you. Draw me; we will run after you."

This divine song was admitted into the sacred canon soon after the Babylonian captivity (most probably by Ezra,) and has been admitted both by Jews and Christians from that time, as constituting an important part of the inspired volume. It is called the Song of Songs, because of its peculiar excellence, there being no other to be compared with it, as delineating and describing the love which exists between Christ and his Church. There are indeed similar images used in other parts of holy writ, and particularly in the 15th Psalm; but there is a richness and variety in this, by which it is pre-eminently distinguished. True it is, that the representations contained in it render it unfit for the carnal eye, which would be more likely to be injured by it, through the influence of a polluted imagination, than to derive from it the good which to a spiritually enlightened mind it is calculated to convey.

Many of the expressions, which, at the time they were written, were clear and intelligible, are, for lack of a more intimate knowledge of the various circumstances which would elucidate them, inexplicable to us; but the general purpose of the whole is evident enough.

It is a kind of allegory written in the form of a pastoral poem, in which different people are introduced, and bear a part of the dialogue between Christ and his redeemed Church (or true believers); the one under the character of a Bridegroom; and the other, of a Bride, espoused to him in this world, and waiting for the consummation of her nuptials in the world to come.

The abruptness with which the poem opens is very remarkable. The spouse, having her mind full of her Beloved, breaks forth without any mention of his name, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." She is ready to think that the minds of all must of necessity be occupied with his excellencies, and must therefore of necessity know to whom she refers. She then commends "his love, as better," and more exhilarating, "than wine, because of the savor of his good ointments. That seems the more proper place for the stop;" and assigns this as the reason of her love towards him, and her ardent desire after him.

These are the two points for our consideration at this time:

I. The reason of the Church's love to Christ.

"His NAME is as ointment poured forth".

A rich ointment poured forth will fill a whole house with its fragrance, [John 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.3), so that all who are within it shall be refreshed with its fragrance; and such is the delight which the whole Church derives from the mention of the name of her Beloved.

Consider his name, "Emmanuel." It was a name given him eight hundred years before he came into the world; and the interpretation of that name is given us by the sacred historian, that we may know all the riches of grace and love contained in it. Its import is, "God with us! [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23)." Wonderful name! God, "the mighty God," with us, worms of the earth; with us, who have been all our days rebels against his Divine Majesty, and who might well have expected to have been made everlasting monuments of his righteous indignation.

In some respect indeed he might bear that name, even in the regions of darkness and misery; since he is there by his wrath and power inflicting his heavy judgments on all who inhabit those dreary mansions.

But he is with his redeemed people by his love. Yes, he is with us in our very nature, "bone of our bone, flesh, of our flesh;" God and man in one person! Stupendous mystery! Can it be so? Is it true, that the God of Heaven and earth has so condescended to assume our nature, and to sojourn upon earth, that he might commend himself to us as our Beloved? Say, you who have any spiritual senses, does not a fragrance go forth at this name Emmanuel, sufficient to fill the whole universe with its fragrances?

But take another name, the name of "Jesus." This was given to him by the Angel, when he was conceived in the womb; and the giving it was considered as a completion of the prophecy that assigned to him the name Emmanuel, [Matthew 1:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21-23). And a fulfillment of the prophecy it was; for "Jesus" is Jah Hosea, or Divine Savior.

Here, in addition to his Godhead, as united to the manhood, we have the end of his incarnation plainly announced; it was, to save a ruined world; yes, "he came, not to condemn the world, but that through him," even through his meritorious blood and righteousness, "the world might be saved."

Think of this, you who have destroyed your own souls, and are trembling for fear of the Divine judgments; your God has become a man, on purpose that he might fulfill the law which you have broken, and endure the curse which you have merited; and by this substitution of himself in your place, might deliver you from death and Hell, and make you partakers of his own eternal kingdom and glory.

Does not this name refresh and animate your souls? Can you hear it without receiving from it sensations which it is not in the power of language to express?

Consider yet one other name, that name whereby we are particularly instructed to call him, "The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)." Here you have the same blessed intimations as in the former names, respecting his Godhead, and the gracious ends of his incarnation; with this additional suggestion, that his righteousness was wrought out for you—yes, that he himself is your Righteousness. A creature's righteousness would not have sufficed for you; you needed the righteousness of God himself; and God himself has become a man, that in your nature he might work out a righteousness that should be imputed to you, and put upon you, and constitute your justifying righteousness at the bar of judgment.

Tell me, brethren, can you hear this unmoved? What spiritual perception can you have, if you are not even ravished with delight at the sound of such a name as this? Surely it is the out-pouring of this ointment that makes Heaven to be the place it is; yes, to be within the reach of this atmosphere, is Heaven!

We forbear to mention any other of his glorious names, lest we distract your attention by the variety. See [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6). Sufficient have been mentioned to justify the Church's attachment to this adorable Savior.

On account of the fragrance diffused by his name, "the virgins love him".

By "the virgins" we understand, all that are "pure in heart," and have been betrothed to him in righteousness and truth, [Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.19-20)." Of all such the Apostle says, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ! [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2)." These all love the Lord Jesus Christ. In the eyes of others, this adorable Being has "no beauty or loveliness for which to be desired, [Isaiah 53:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.2)." But in the eyes of the redeemed Church "he is truly precious, [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7)," "fairer than ten thousand," and "altogether lovely;" and the one desire of her heart is, to be able to say, "This is my Friend and my Beloved! Song of Songs 5:10; [Song of Songs 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16)."

In comparison with him, all other suitors are utterly despised. The whole universe presents no other object to her view that deserves a thought; the constant state of her soul towards him is, "How great is your goodness! How great is your beauty! [Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.17)." "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside you! [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)."

As sweet as created excellencies once appeared to her, she has now no eye to see them, no taste to enjoy them. She is altogether occupied with the savor of her Beloved's name, the perfume of which makes every other fragrance worthless at least, if not nauseous and offensive. In a word, so entirely does this beloved object fill her soul, that with him a dungeon would be Heaven; and without him, Heaven itself would be a dungeon or a desert.

From hence naturally follows,

II. Her ardent desire after him.

Conscious that his gifts are his own, and that without his gracious assistance she can do nothing, she presents before him,

1. Her supplication.

Our blessed Lord himself has said, "No man can come unto me, unless the Father, who has sent me, draw him! [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44)." And this total insufficiency for everything that is good, the Church confesses in this short but ardent petition, "Draw me!" None but Jesus himself can open for us the box in which this ointment is contained, or give the spiritual perception whereby alone its fragrance can be discovered.

How many, in the days of his flesh, were rather incensed against him, than drawn to him, by all the wonders of his love! and how many at this day are like the idols which they worship! "they have eyes, and see not; ears, and hear not; noses, and smell not, [Psalm 115:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 115.5-8)." But these have had spiritual senses given unto them; and therefore they pant after communion with their blessed Lord.

Observe, it is not the carnal unregenerate man alone that needs to offer this petition; it is here offered by "the virgins," "the upright, See the close of verse 4," who already love their Lord; and it is necessary to be offered by all, as long as they continue in the body. There are times and seasons when the most favored of mankind are comparatively dead and dull. Even "the Wise Virgins," as well as the Foolish ones, for a time "slumbered and slept." Again and again does every true believer needs to be awakened, and to have his sluggishness overcome by fresh communications of divine grace, and fresh manifestations of the Savior's love. Continually do we need to be "drawn with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love, [Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.4);" and therefore we must continually renew the same petition as the Church offers in our text.

2. Her resolution.

It is no reluctant service which the Bride will render, when once she feels the attractions of the Bridegroom's love. No; she will "run after him;" she will run with all her might; she will regard no obstacles without; she will yield to no impediments within; she "will run and not be weary; she will press forward, and not faint! [Isaiah 40:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.29-31)." The space she has already passed, she will account as nothing, "forgetting the things that are behind, she will press forward for that which is before, if by any means she may apprehend that, for which she has been apprehended of God in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14)."

The change of person also is here remarkable, "Draw me, and we will run after you." Not only will the redeemed Church summon all the powers of her soul, and unite them all in the service of her Lord, but she will bring all she can along with her. When once she feels the constraining influence of Christ's love, she will not be content to come alone; she would impress every person that she beholds, with the same love which she herself feels, and would bring all others into the very same union with him which she herself desires.

And herein her love differs from that which is here used to set it forth; the love which is felt towards an earthly object, admits not of participation with others; it would engross all the affections of its beloved object, and not endure a rival. But the redeemed Church's love to Christ is enhanced by the most extended communication of the blessings which she herself enjoys. She would have all the earth to know, and love him. Just as Andrew and Philip, as soon as they found the Messiah, invited Peter and Nathanael to come and participate their joy—so does every member of the Church of Christ; he will, like Abraham, "command his household" to fear and love his Lord, and will use all possible means to extend the kingdom of his Redeemer throughout all the earth.

From this subject we may **learn**,

1. What reason we have to seek the knowledge of Christ.

Who is there that has such a title to our affections as he? Who is there so excellent in himself, or such a source of blessedness to those who love him? Go through the universe; survey everything that stands in competition with him; and see what it can do for your souls. Take that highest of earthly bliss, which is here used to shadow forth the blessedness of union with Christ; how often have they been disappointed who have most passionately sought, and fondly hoped that they had attained, the summit of human happiness! And where it has been enjoyed in its utmost perfection, how soon has it been cut short by the hand of death!

But nothing can damp, and nothing can terminate, the blessedness of those who are united to Christ. On the contrary, in the midst of the deepest distresses—his love will fill you with the richest consolation. When a fainting fit has come upon the body, a strong and pungent fragrance will revive it; and so will the fragrance of Jesus' name refresh the soul, when nothing else under Heaven will reach, and resuscitate, its languid powers. O let every one of you seek this union, and never rest until you can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his! [Song of Songs 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.16)."

Yet let me remind you of a most important distinction that must ever be made between the knowledge of Christ, and "the savor of the knowledge of him, [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.14)." That which resides in the head only, will be of no avail, as bringing you into union with him. It is that only which diffuses a fragrance through the whole soul, that will terminate in the everlasting enjoyment of him in Heaven.

2. In what way we should testify our regard for him.

Seek him continually, and with your whole hearts; and whenever you find sluggishness creeping upon you, renew your cry to him, "Draw me, draw me!" Your hearts are prone to backslide from him—yes, prone too to alienate from him the affections that should center in him alone; but strive that you may be able at all times to say with David, "My soul follows hard after you;" and if at any time you are enabled to lay hold on your Beloved, do not let him go, but "cleave to him with full purpose of heart."

At the same time see what you can do in your families, in your neighborhood, and in the world at large—to bring others also to him. Commend him to them; endeavor to bring them into the assemblies, where he manifests his presence; entreat him to extend his attractive influences to them also, even as he has done to you; and labor that, if possible, all the world may behold his beauty, and be comforted with his love.

As for yourselves, look to the final consummation of your love in the eternal world, when your fruition of him shall be more intimate than it can be in this world, and shall continue without intermission or alloy through all eternity!

#849

THE CHURCH'S FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

**[Song of Songs 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.1-3)**

"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight; and his fruit was sweet to my taste." KJV

"I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste!"

From the general scope of this whole poem, we can have no hesitation in saying, that the words which we have read are a part of a dialogue between Christ and his Church; the former part containing his testimony respecting her; and the latter, her testimony respecting him. It is a kind of pastoral song, as the images used by both the parties show; and, though exceedingly difficult of interpretation in some parts, it is very intelligible and instructive in others.

We must bear in mind, that Christ speaks as the Bridegroom of his Church; and the Church speaks as his Spouse; while the "sons" and "daughters" mentioned in our text, are those children of Adam who yet lie in darkness and the shadow of death, or, at best, have only "the form of godliness, without the power."

As for the "daughters of Jerusalem," who occasionally bear a part in the dialogue, they are professors of religion, who, though friendly on the whole, are not yet brought into this near relation to Christ, nor made partakers of his saving benefits.

In discoursing on the words before us, we shall consider,

I. Christ's testimony respecting his Church.

The commendation bestowed upon her is the highest she could possibly receive; it is, that she, according to the measure of grace given to her, resembles him. In order to point out the resemblance,

He first declares **his** own character.

"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." Whatever is most excellent in the universe, is brought forward from time to time, to designate and illustrate the character of our Lord.

Of the heavenly bodies he is the Sun, "the Sun of Righteousness."

Of inferior creatures, he is the Lion, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah."

Even the plants and flowers yield him honor also; as the rose is exceeded by none in fragrance, and the lily is pre-eminent in beauty, he is a Rose, "the Rose of Sharon," whose excellence was proverbial, [Isaiah 35:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.2); and a Lily, "the Lily of the valleys," to which Solomon in all his glory was not worthy to be compared! [Matthew 6:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.29).

Infinitely diversified are his perfections. In whatever point of view we consider him, his person, his offices, his relations, we shall be fully convinced, that to him alone pertain the garments which were "made for glory and beauty! [Exodus 28:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.40)." In his person are united all the attributes of God, and all the grace of humanity in their highest possible perfection! In his offices, nothing is lacking that could contribute to the welfare of his Church and people.

As their High-priest, he has made a full and all-sufficient atonement for them.

As their Prophet, he instructs them by his Word and Spirit.

As their King, he rules over them, and in them; and puts all their enemies under their feet.

As for his relations, there is no relation that can inspire us with hope and confidence, which he does not bear towards his believing people. He is our Shepherd, our Brother, and our Friend. Whether viewed in his exaltation, as God; or in his humiliation, as Man; or in his mediatorial state, as "Emmanuel, God with us"—he is infinitely great and glorious, "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely!"

He then acknowledges his people's resemblance to him.

To the glories of his Godhead no creature can bear any true resemblance; so infinitely is he above all. But in his humiliation Jesus was a pattern both of lowliness and purity, to which his believing people are conformed. Yes moreover, as he in this respect infinitely excels the highest of his creatures, so does his redeemed Church excel all others of "the daughters" of men; she is, like him, "a lily;" like him also, "a lily among thorns;" no others bearing any more comparison with her, than a thorn or brier with the lily.

Mark the lowliness of the true Christian; he bows down his head with a sense of his own unworthiness, and manifold infirmities; yet is he "pure," at least in purpose and desire, "even as God is pure." "The very same mind is in him that was in Christ Jesus;" yes, "being joined to the Lord, he is one spirit with him;" "a partaker of his holiness," "a partaker of his very nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)," "created anew after his image in righteousness and true holiness."

Compare the redeemed Church with others, and they are no better than "thorns" before her; so superior is she to them in all her principles, her purposes, her attainments.

The one have no higher aim or end than self; the other disdains to act but from the love of God, and for the glory of his name.

The one leave God out even from the most sacred exercises; the other brings him into the most common acts and offices of life, [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31).

The one have no life but what they received from nature; the other has Christ himself living in him; yes, "Christ himself is his life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4)."

True it is, that by nature the believer was not at all different from others, but grace has made the difference; according to that prophetic declaration, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall grow up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off, [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.13)." Thus is that amply verified which was spoken by Solomon, "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor, [Proverbs 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.26)."

In reply to this commendation, the redeemed Church proclaims,

II. The Christian's testimony respecting Christ.

This he bears,

1. From his knowledge of Christ's excellencies.

Christ is "as the apple tree among the trees of the forest." Other trees can afford shadow only; while to those who take refuge under him, he administers the most refreshing and satisfying food. Under them, the soul that continues to abide, must perish; but the soul that abides in him, shall live forever. All that it can want or desire is found in him. He is "the tree of life, that bears twelve manner of fruits, [Revelation 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.2);" one for every season, every situation, every circumstance of life. "The very leaves of that tree are for the healing of the nations." The law appeared to offer a beneficial retreat; but it could never satisfy the hungry soul, or "make a man perfect as pertaining to the conscience." But what not all the trees of that forest could do, Christ has done, [Romans 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.2); and does continually for all who seek repose under the shadow of his wings. Those who have the clearest views of his excellency, "determine to know nothing but him, even him crucified."

2. From his experience of Christ's love.

The redeemed Church here says, in fact, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, and my hands have handled of the Word of life, the same I declare unto you!" In fact, no other knowledge than that which has been wrought into our own experience, is of any use; at least, not for the Christian's own benefit. Hear then the redeemed Church's happy experience, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight; and his fruit was sweet unto my taste." The believer has come to Christ weary and heavy-laden with a sense of his sins, and has found rest unto his soul. Like the traveler fainting beneath the intense heat of a vertical sun, he has sought the shade in Christ Jesus, who has approved himself all-sufficient, even like "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land! [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.4); [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2)."

Of his fruits too does the believer eat in a rich abundance. O! how sweet is his pardoning love to the soul, when he says, "Your sins are forgiven—go in peace!" Who can describe the blessedness of that peace which proceeds from him; from Him who said, "My peace I give unto you!" Truly it is "a peace that passes all understanding.

As for the joy with which these manifestations are accompanied, it is "unspeakable and full of glory." How can a soul feel anything but exquisite "delight," when thus favored with "the spirit of adoption," yes, "the witness of the Spirit" also attesting its relation to Christ, "sealing it unto the day of redemption," and giving it even now as "a pledge" and a foretaste "of its heavenly inheritance?"

Such are the fruits of which every one shall eat, who sits under the shadow of the Lord Jesus; and "sweet shall they be unto his taste," even "sweeter than honey or the honey-comb."

Having no fear that either of these testimonies shall ever be set aside, we ground upon them a word of **exhortation**.

1. Let us contemplate the excellencies of the Lord Jesus.

There is not anything in the world which may not serve to illustrate his beauty; for, in fact, all created excellencies are but rays of his glory, and stars twinkling with his reflected splendor. We do not think enough of him; we can admire beauty in the creature, but have no eyes to behold it in Him who is the center and source of all. Did we but duly reflect on him, we would pant after a union with him; and despise everything else in comparison with him. "All other knowledge would be to us but as dross and dung."

Truly "his name is as ointment poured forth; and therefore do the virgins love him! [Song of Songs 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.3)." Say, believer, Is he not "precious" to your soul? [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7). O that every one among us would be persuaded to go into this garden, and compare the fragrance of this "rose," and the purity of this "lily," with all that ever his eyes beheld, or his most impassioned sense experienced! O that all might "behold his glory—the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;" "the brightness of whose glory he is, and the express image of his person! [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14). [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)."

The effect of such a sight cannot be conceived by those who never yet beheld it; for we should be constrained by it to cry out, "How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty! [Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.17)." and, while beholding his glory, we would be "changed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

Go, beloved, into the holy mount, and converse with him; and you shall come down, like Moses, irradiated with the beams of his glory. Be conversant with this "lily," and you shall become "lilies" yourselves!

2. Let us kindly receive his overtures.

We have before shown, that this is a dialogue between Christ us a Bridegroom, and the redeemed Church as his Spouse. Into this relation Christ is desirous to bring us all. We come in his name, to invite you all to unite yourselves with him; we come, that we may "present every soul among you as a chaste virgin to Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2)." Hear the invitation given, as it were, from his own lips, "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD! [Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.19-20)."

Beloved brethren, Who is there that has such a title to your affections as He? Who can make you so happy as He? Have not all other sources of comfort proved as "broken cisterns that can hold no water?" Why then will you not "come to the fountain of living waters?"

Do not say, "I am unworthy of this high honor." Who is not unworthy? Who could ever have obtained it by any worthiness of his own? Every person that was ever united to him was first a wretched, helpless outcast, like yourself, [Ezekiel 16:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.4-8); and, if you desire a union with him, be assured that "he will never cast you out." Only "come to his banqueting-house, and his banner over you shall be love! verse 4."

3. Let us duly estimate our Christian privileges.

The happiness of the soul that is united unto Christ, no words can declare, no imagination can conceive. Only hear the terms in which He and his Spouse speak of each other; he calls her, "My Love;" and of him she speaks in that endearing term, "My Beloved." Think, for a moment, what immense, what inconceivable privileges are implied in these terms, whether as applied by him to us, or by us to him!

Whatever he is—he is for you!

Whatever he has—he possesses for you!

Whatever he does—he does for you!

Whatever he enjoys—he enjoys as your Head, your Representative, your Forerunner.

"The glory which his Father has given him, He has given you."

You may enjoy earthly sweets, and they will cloy; yes, the most fragrant rose will fade. Not so "the Rose of Sharon;" its fragrance will be undiminished to all eternity. You may sit under the shadow of other trees, and their foliage shall fail; yes, like Jonah's gourd, they may wither in a night.

But not so "the apple-tree that grows in the midst of the Paradise of God;" there is no worm at the root of that tree; its gracious influence shall endure forever; and its delicious fruits be ever new.

Make then these things your own, by "apprehending Christ," and giving yourselves up to him; for "all things are yours, if you are Christ's." Only "taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is;" and having once "tasted that the Lord is gracious, you will never rest until you can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his!"

4. Let us walk worthy of our high relation as Christ's redeemed people.

If one be brought into union with an earthly monarch, she feels an obligation to conduct herself henceforth in a way suited to her high calling. And shall not we, when united to "the King of kings?" Yes! We must resemble him, and exhibit, according to the measure of the grace conferred upon us, the mind that was in him.

Let us especially resemble him in his humility and purity. We are not indeed to "bow down our heads as a bulrush," as if we were in a pitiable and disconsolate state; but to bow our heads as "the lily," is our beauty and our excellence. Never does the Christian look so beautiful as when he is "low in his own eyes." Surely whatever may have been done for us, and in us—we must still to our last hour "walk humbly with God."

We must also be pure and spotless as the lily—yes, "blameless and harmless as the sons of God." We must not be contented with low attainments; but must seek to "walk worthy of the Lord himself," "whose we are, and whom we profess to serve."

Let this be the one object of our ambition; and, as we profess to surpass every flower of the field in fragrance and beauty—then let us so live, that we may not fear a comparison with any of the sons of men. Let us not be found to be vain boasters of privileges that are merely notional; but, while we profess to enjoy so much in and through the Lord Jesus, let it be seen, that, "having this hope, we do indeed purify ourselves, even as he is pure! [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

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PERSEVERANCE CROWNED WITH SUCCESS

**[Song of Songs 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 3.1-4)**

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me; to whom I said, Saw you him whom my soul loves? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loves; I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." KJV

"All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him. The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. "Have you seen the one my heart loves?" Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go till I had brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me." NIV

One peculiar excellence of the Song of Solomon, is that it delineates with admirable beauty and precision the workings of the believer's soul under all the varieties of Christian experience. In the first conversion of the soul, God communicates his blessings unsolicited, unsought; so that it may be justly said, "He is found of them that sought him not! [Isaiah 65:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.1)." But in our subsequent walk with God, we may sometimes find occasion to complain, "I sought him, but I found him not." Thus it was with the Bride in the passage before us; and her conduct under these circumstances is instructive, as the outcome of it is encouraging to the redeemed Church of God in all ages. In our remarks on the Bride's experience, we shall notice,

I. Her persevering exertions.

When it is said, "By night on my bed I sought him," we are not to take the words in a literal, but figurative sense, as expressing the cold and listless way in which the Bride had sought her Beloved; and it is no wonder that, when sought in such a way, he did not grant to manifest himself unto her. Disappointed in her hopes, "she rose, and went about the city, seeking him in the streets and broad ways," accounting no time unseasonable, no labor too great, for the attainment of an object so dear to her as a sight of her Beloved. Still however her labor was in vain, "she sought him, but found him not." And thus the Lord Jesus Christ still frequently for a season suspends the manifestations of his love, and leaves in darkness the soul that seeks him.

1. The Lord Jesus may for a season suspend the manifestations of his love, to correct our lukewarmness.

Lukewarmness in his people is most offensive to him, [Revelation 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16); and, when indulged, "grieves his Spirit," and provokes him to hide his face from us. He has told us in the Prophets, that we must not expect to "find him, unless we seek him with our whole hearts! [Jeremiah 29:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.12-13)." How solemn is that warning which he has given in his Gospel, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able! [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24)." What wonder is it therefore if he punishes our sloth by a long suspension of his visits, and make us to eat of the bitter fruit of our own ways? By such a dispensation he plainly says to us, "Have you not procured this unto yourself, in that you have forsaken me, when I led you along the way? Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backslidings shall reprove you; know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the Lord your God! [Jeremiah 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.17); [Jeremiah 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.19)."

2. The Lord Jesus may for a season suspend the manifestations of his love, to stimulate our desires after him.

Our souls ought to "pant after him, as the deer after the water-brooks;" yes, they should "break for the very fervent desire which we have towards him, [Psalm 119:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.20)." But if a listless and inoperative wish would suffice, we should never exert ourselves as we ought. Had the Bride succeeded by seeking her Beloved on her bed, she would never have risen to seek him in the streets of the city; and, if we could attain in a way of self-indulgence the rewards of self-denying exertion, we should be too ready to say to our souls, "Soul, take your ease."

But our Lord has told us that his favor is not to be sought in such a way as that; he has said, that "the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence; and that the violent must take it by force;" and he withholds from us the manifestations of his love, on purpose that he may quicken us in our pursuit of him, and stimulate us to put forth into activity the devoutest energies of our souls, [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15).

3. The Lord Jesus may for a season suspend the manifestations of his love, to endear his presence to us.

To the temporary loss which the Bride had sustained must be ascribed the zeal with which she afterwards held fast her Beloved. In the same way, we well know how the Courts of the Lord were endeared to David by his long banishment from them, under the persecutions of Saul, and during the rebellion of Absalom. And, no doubt, in proportion as we are led into deep waters, will be our gratitude for deliverance from them [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3); in proportion as we have passed through the afflictive scenes of David, will be the zeal and ardor with which we shall henceforth make boast of our great Deliverer, "Who is so great a God as our God! [Psalm 77:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.1-4); [Psalm 77:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.13)." When we feel that we have "had much forgiven us—then we shall love much."

The Bride however used not her exertions in vain, as we see by,

II. The successful outcome of them.

In her search after her Beloved, she inquired of the watchmen, whether they had seen him, or could give her any news respecting him. And, soon after she had parted with them, she found him. By "the watchmen," we understand the ministers of God, who "watch for souls," whose special commission is to "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and to say to the fearful heart: Do not fear; your God will come and save you! [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4)." And it should seem that it was in following these directions she attained her end. But, however this might be, we see clearly from her example, that persevering endeavors shall be crowned with success.

This is expressly promised by God himself.

Exceeding strong is that declaration of our blessed Lord,

"Ask, and you shall have;  
 seek, and you shall find;  
 knock, and it shall be opened unto you.  
For every one that asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened! [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8)." It is not said indeed that the answer shall be given, as it was to Daniel, in the very act of prayer; but it is secured from the first moment that we ask in faith. The answer shall be given in the best manner, and at the fittest time; according as the Prophet Hosea has said, "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and the former rain, unto the earth, [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.3)." "The vision is for an appointed time; and if we wait for it, it shall come, and not tarry an instant beyond the time" fixed in the counsels of unerring wisdom, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3) and [Hebrews 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.37).

It is also confirmed by actual experience.

The poor Canaanitess who was so urgent in her supplications to Christ to come and heal her daughter, met with a denial; and such a denial as seemed to preclude any hope of ultimate success, "He answered her not a word." The Disciples then interceded for her, and requested, that she might be dismissed with a favorable answer, if it was only to prevent her from wearying them with her entreaties; yet they also were refused, and in such a manner as effectually to silence them, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Still however she would not give up all hope, but with deeper prostration than before renewed her petition; but the answer she received was more discouraging than before, in that it blamed her presumption in hoping to participate in any respect the blessings which were designed only for God's peculiar people, "It is not fit to take the children's bread, and cast it unto dogs." Who would believe, that, after all this, she should persevere in her request, and succeed at last? Yet so she did, [Matthew 15:22-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.22-28).

In the same way, such shall be the success of every man that "continues instant in prayer." To this effect our Lord assures us, in a parable which was spoken for the express purpose of encouraging people "to pray and not faint."

A poor widow, we are told, obtained redress from an unjust judge through mere dint of her importunity; and from thence we are taught to draw this inference, "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! [Luke 18:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1-8)." Here then we are warranted in affirming that the Bride's success shall be realized in us, if only, like her, we rise to the occasion, and press through every impediment to the enjoyment of our God. God "never did, nor ever will, say to any" Seek my face in vain!"

But that we may profit more fully by the example of the Bride, let us notice,

III. The use she made of her success.

Having found her Beloved, she held him and would not let him go, until she had brought him into her mother's house, where she hoped her communion with him would be more intimate, and free from interruption. In the same way:

1. We should exert ourselves to retain the Savior with us.

There is a holy violence which we are permitted to use, like that of Jacob, who "wrestled all night with the Angel, and said, I will not let you go, unless you bless me! [Genesis 32:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-28)." But how often, for lack of this, is our enjoyment of the Savior short and transient, "like the early dew, or the morning cloud that passes away!" We should "stir ourselves up to lay hold on him;" and, if he would leave us, we must constrain him, as the disciples at Emmaus did, to take up his abode with us, [Luke 24:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.28-29).

We should dread nothing so much as the loss of his gracious presence; and knowing what a holy and a jealous God he is, we should strive with all imaginable care to hold him fast, and avoid everything which may "grieve his Spirit," and provoke him to depart from us.

2. We should seek to enjoy the most intimate communion with him.

The Church may be considered as the place to which the Bride strove to bring her Beloved. And we also, both in the closet and the Church, should seek such manifestations of his love, as cannot be enjoyed in the noise and bustle of the world.

In all the ordinances of his grace, and at his holy table especially, we should labor to ensure his presence; since without him they are only "as wells without water," which "fill with shame and confusion" the thirsty soul, [Jeremiah 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.3).

Nor should we be satisfied with any small communications of his grace and peace; seek the largest possible measure of them, even to "be filled with all the fullness of God."

In a word, so "dwell in him, and let him dwell in you;" and so be "one with him, and let him be one with you;" that you may even now, in communion with him, have a pledge of the blessedness of Heaven, even of that joy, all "fullness of which is at his right hand for evermore."

From her example, let us **learn**:

1. To fix our hearts supremely on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Four times does the Bride designate him by this character, "Him whom my soul loves!" Let him be familiarized to us also under the same endearing name. O let him be in our estimation "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely;" so that, if he interrogates us as he did Peter: Do you love you Me? Then we may be able to make the same appeal to him as Peter did, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you!"

2. Not to indulge sloth in our pursuit of him.

"The idle soul shall suffer hunger; but the diligent soul shall be made fat." What darkness have many brought upon their souls by their unwatchfulness! Peter was warned by our Lord to "watch and pray, that he might not enter into temptation." But Peter slept; and, though repeatedly awaked and reproved, gave way to sloth again, the instant he was left to himself. What advantage Satan took of him, and what were the bitter fruits of his supineness—we all know.

Let us "be sober and vigilant." Let us not pray "upon our bed," as regardless whether we are heard or not, but let us "stir up ourselves to lay hold on Christ;" and then "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." If we would succeed in our pursuit of heavenly joys, we must not only pray, but "watch unto prayer with all perseverance."

3. Not to yield to despondency, because we find him not so present with us as we could wish.

We are very apt to be impatient under the hidings of his face, and to conclude that he has utterly forsaken us. This was the fault of the Church in the days of old; but God expostulated with her, and reproved her, [Isaiah 40:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.28-31); and assured her, that she was so indelibly engraved on the palms of his hands, that he could not possibly forget her [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16); he might indeed "forsake her for a moment, but with everlasting kindness would he have mercy upon her, [Isaiah 54:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-8)."

If then similar fears arise in your bosom, say as David did, after he had unhappily given way to them, "This is my infirmity! [Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-10)." Be assured, that God, who is faithful to his promises, "will never leave you nor forsake you! [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6);" that "if you seek him, he will be found by you! [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2);" and that "in due season you shall reap, if you faint not! [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9)."

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SPIRITUAL SLOTH REPROVED

**[Song of Songs 5:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.2-8)**

"I sleep, but my heart wakes; it is the voice of my beloved that knocks, saying, Open to me my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on! I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my affections were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; my soul failed when he spoke; I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him, that I am sick of love." KJV

"I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night." I have taken off my robe—must I put it on again? I have washed my feet—must I soil them again? My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer. The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak, those watchmen of the walls! O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—if you find my lover, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love!" NIV

Two things we should guard against in reading the Song of Solomon; namely, the laying an undue stress on particular words, and the dwelling too minutely on particular circumstances. There is a latitude due to the very species of composition, that may well exempt it from severe criticism, and from an over-strained application of its several parts.

No one can ever read the Holy Scriptures without seeing many expressions which modern delicacy and refinement constrain us to pass over, as offensive to our ears. These expressions occur both in the Law and in the Prophets; and therefore we cannot wonder if they occur in a composition intended to exhibit the mutual love subsisting between Christ and his redeemed Church, and shadowing it forth under the most delicate of all images—the mutual regards of a bridegroom and his bride.

Allowance must be made for the customs of different nations; a thing may not be at all improper in one age or country, which in another age and country would be highly indecorous, as not being sanctioned by common usage.

Besides, there are many customs which prevailed in the days of Solomon, which, if they were known to us, would reflect light on many parts of this poem, which are involved in obscurity because we lack the key to the explanation of them. Even what we do know must be touched upon with the greatest delicacy, lest what was written only for the inflaming of our spiritual affections, should become rather an occasion of evil.

The true way to profit by this book is to take the general scope of it, rather than its particular images, as the subjects for our reflection. And, if we attend to this rule, we shall find the passage which we have now read, replete with instruction. It informs us of the reproof which the Bride received, for the indifference with which on one occasion she treated her beloved.

Let us distinctly notice,

I. The indolence she indulged.

She was in a state, not of absolute sleep, like the ungodly world, but of slumber, half asleep, and half awake, "I slept, but my heart was awake."

Moreover, when her beloved came to hold communion with her, she was inattentive to his voice. Yes, notwithstanding he addressed her in terms of most endeared affection, and complained of the inconvenience he had sustained through her unwatchfulness, she still gave but little heed to his voice. In hot countries, "the night dews" are not only strong, but often very injurious to those who are exposed to them; yet even this consideration did not operate to produce in her that activity which the occasion required.

Instead of rising at his call, she urged vain and foolish excuses to justify her neglect; and in fact told him that his visit at that time was unacceptable. These excuses were only a cloak for her own sloth and self-indulgence; had her graces been in lively exercise, the obstacles she complained of would have vanished in an instant. This conduct gives a striking picture of what too generally prevails among ourselves.

1. Her indolence manifests our slothful habits.

There is in the very best of men "the flesh yet lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit striving against the flesh, so that they cannot do the things they would, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)." Even Paul complained, that, while with his mind he served the law of God, with his flesh he was still in some measure subjected to the law of sin, not indeed as a willing servant, but as a captive, who in vain sought a perfect deliverance from that detested enemy! [Romans 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.14); [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18); [Romans 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22-23).

True indeed, where due vigilance is kept up, "the old man" cannot gain any permanent advantage; but even when "the spirit is willing, the flesh is too often weak;" and all Christians in some degree find, that "when they would do good, evil is present with them."

It is indeed greatly to be lamented, that "the Wise Virgins" should ever so resemble the Foolish Virgins, as to "slumber and sleep" like them. But so, alas! it is; and when, by reason of our failures, we are ready to complain, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!" we need the rebuke which was given to that petition, "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, and 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)."

2. Her indolence manifests our insensibility to the kindness of our beloved.

How inexpressibly tender are his addresses to us! See the invitations, the entreaties, the expostulations that pervade every part of the sacred volume; and say whether they are not sufficient to melt the most obdurate heart! "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me, [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20)." Yet how long does he stand and knock in vain!

His pleadings too, how kind, how gracious, how forcible they are! "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? Why do my people say, we will come no more unto you, [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31)." "Turn unto me; for I have redeemed you; I am even married unto you! [Jeremiah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.12); [Jeremiah 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.14)." "Turn! turn! why will you die, O House of Israel?"

But all his expostulations have been to no purpose with respect to the generality; and even on the best they are far from operating to the extent they ought. Paul could say, "The love of Christ constrains us," or carries us away like a mighty torrent; but how many are the seasons when his attractions are not so felt by us, and when, instead of regarding him as "the chief among ten thousand," we see scarcely any "beauty or loveliness in him for which he is to be desired!"

3. Her indolence manifests our vain excuses with which we cloak our sins.

Something arising out of our present circumstances—we are ready to plead in extenuation at least, if not in excuse, for our sloth. But, if we would deal faithfully with ourselves, we should see that all our pleas are a mere cloak for self-indulgence. We are called to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," but we do not like self-denial. To "mortify our earthly members" is a work in which we cannot bear to engage. The "cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye" is so painful to us, that we cannot be prevailed upon to put forth the resolution it requires. We promise ourselves a "more convenient season," which in too many instances never comes at all! Like those in the parable, we find some reason for declining the invitations sent to us, and return for answer, "I beg you to have me excused".

A due consideration of her fault will prepare our minds for,

II. The reproof she met with.

At last, beginning to see her error, she rose to open to her beloved; and with such ardor of affection did she open to him, that "myrrh dropped, as it were, from her hands upon the handle of the lock!" But behold, he was gone; and though she sought him, she could not find him; and though she called after him, he gave her no answer. The watchmen too, reproved her with great severity, as questioning even the sincerity of one who could so treat the beloved of her soul. And such reproof must we all expect, if we give way to sloth instead of watching unto prayer.

1. We must expect that He will depart from us.

Truly he is "a God who hides himself," a holy and a jealous God, that will make us to "eat of the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices." He has warned us not to "grieve his Holy Spirit," lest he depart from us. I "will go and return to my place," says he, "until they acknowledge their offence! [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15)."

And oh! how painful are the seasons when he withdraws from us, and leaves our souls in darkness! Even he himself, when for our sins he was deserted of his God, how bitterly did he cry, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" O that we may never provoke him to put that cup into our hands!

How distressing will it be to be reduced to any measure of that experience which Christ endured for us, "O my God, why are you so far from helping me, and from the voice of my roaring? I cry in the day time, but you hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent, [Matthew 22:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.1-2)." See David in this predicament [Psalm 42:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.3); [Psalm 77:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.6-9), and "let us be instructed, lest we provoke him to depart from us also."

2. We must expect that the Word and ordinances shall be unproductive of any solid comfort to us.

The "Watchmen" are the ministers, whose office is not only to instruct and comfort, but also to warn and "rebuke with all authority." True it is, they may be too hasty and severe in their reproofs; and may by such indiscreet zeal make the heart of the righteous sad, when they should rather bind up the broken heart, and heal the wounded spirit. But it is possible also, that they may be too lenient, and "speak peace to people when there is no peace." But where there is no fault in their ministrations, God may make their word as a sword, to enter into the very bones of those who hear it, and to cut them to the heart!

Even the promises, when held forth in all their fullness and all their freeness, may afford no comfort to the soul of one who is under the hidings of God's face; but may add tenfold poignancy to all his griefs.

How unhappy was the state of David, when even the thought of God himself was a source of sorrow and despondency, rather than of joy and peace! "He remembered God, and was troubled; and his soul refused comfort."

In like manner, all the wonders of redeeming love may be made a source of the deepest anguish to our souls, by the apprehension that we have no part or lot in them. If then we would not bring these heavy judgments on our souls, let us "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who yet enjoy the light of God's countenance.

Happy, happy are you, in the possession of this rich mercy; Surely such a state is a foretaste of Heaven itself. But do not presume upon it. Do not say, "My mountain stands strong; I shall never be moved;" lest you cause God to "hide his face from you, and you be troubled." "Do not be high-minded; but fear!" Keep upon your watch-tower, "let your loins be girt, and your lamps trimmed;" and watch every moment for the coming of your Lord. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he comes, shall find so doing!"

2. Those who are under the hidings of their Redeemer's face.

If others are not to presume, so neither are you to despond. "If your sorrow endures for a night, there is joy awaiting you in the morning." This do: imitate the Bride in the passage before us. She desired the prayers and intercessions of the saints, and entreated them, in their seasons of communion with their Lord, to plead her cause, "I charge you, when you see him, tell him that I am sick of love." She felt no grief like the absence of her beloved; and could find comfort in nothing but the restoration of his love.

Thus let your hearts be fixed on him; even on him only; and allow nothing to weaken your regards to him. Never entertain hard thoughts of him. Take shame to yourselves, until you even loath yourselves in dust and ashes; but do not relax your love to him, nor your confidence in him. Say with yourselves, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him." Then will he in due season return to your souls, so that "your light shall rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day." Only be content to "go on your way weeping, bearing the precious seed of penitence and faith; and you shall surely come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you!"

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TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCIES OF CHRIST

**[Song of Songs 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.9)**

"What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?"

Though zeal in every earthly pursuit is approved and commended, zeal for holiness is almost universally banished by the world. The most temperate exertions are deemed excessive, and a moderate degree of solicitude is called enthusiasm. Even those who profess godliness are too often found ready to dampen the ardor which people, more active than themselves, may at any time express.

Thus the Bride was checked in her inquiries after her beloved. The "daughters of Jerusalem," who keep up the dialogue with the Bride and Bridegroom, seem to be either formal professors of religion, or to have made a very small progress in the divine life. And they, when the Bride, under great trouble and anxiety, requested their intercession, reflected on her as manifesting an intemperate and needless zeal. But we will answer their questions, by showing,

I. The excellencies of our Beloved.

Who the Beloved of the redeemed Church is, we need not declare; since it is too manifest to admit a doubt. There is not a member of that body who does not regard Jesus with supreme affection. Nor is there any apology needed for such a choice. His excellencies are exceedingly great.

In him are concentrated all the glories of the Godhead, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). Being the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, he must of necessity possess all the Divine perfections! [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3). To search out these perfections is beyond the ability of any finite being, [Job 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.7); but to love and adore him on account of them is the duty and privilege of all his people.

The excellencies of his human nature may be more easily declared. There his glory is veiled, so that we may behold and contemplate it without being blinded by its overwhelming splendor. He was not only holy, but holiness itself, without spot or blemish. His most inveterate enemies, Satan himself not excepted, could not find a flaw in him, [John 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.46). [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.30), and God himself has borne testimony, that in him was no sin, [1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.5).

As Mediator, he united both the Godhead and the Manhood in his own person, and executed an office which he alone was able to sustain. In that character we behold him reconciling God to man, and man to God, [2 Corinthians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.19), yes, glorifying all the attributes of God in the salvation of sinners! [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26). Well may we, in this view of him, exclaim, "How great is his goodness, how great is his beauty! [Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.17)."

But the text requires us to speak of him in a **comparative**view.

Surely there is no other object of affection in the universe worthy to be compared with him.

In whom is there such a marvelous combination of excellencies? As God, as Man, and as Mediator—he not only unites in himself every perfection proper to the Divine and human nature, but exhibits a character peculiar to himself, a character that is and ever must be the admiration of the whole universe.

In whom was there ever found anyone excellence in so eminent a degree? There have been men wise, and virtuous and loving; but in him were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3); and he was not only virtuous, but virtue itself incarnate; and as for his love, its heights and depths can never be explored! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19).

Indeed, whatever excellence has at any time beamed forth in the creature, it has been nothing but a ray reflected from this Sun of Righteousness, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7).

We may ask yet further, Whose excellencies were ever so beneficial to us? Others indeed have profited us by their example; but He, by his obedience, has wrought out a righteousness for us; a righteousness wherein the vilest of sinners, if truly penitent, shall stand perfect and complete in the sight of God! [Romans 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.18-19). Let the contemptuous inquirer then blush for his ignorance; and acknowledge that our Beloved infinitely transcends everything that can be put in competition with him.

According to his excellencies must of necessity be,

II. The regard we owe to Him.

If we look to the example of the Bride, who well knew how to appreciate his worth, we shall see how we ought to manifest our affection towards him.

1. We should esteem him above everything in the world.

The *Bride* has used every simile that the most fertile imagination could suggest, in order to express her sense of his excellency, [Song of Songs 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.3) and in ten different particulars, 5:10-16. David esteemed nothing in Heaven or earth in comparison with him, [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25); and Paul counted all things but dung for the knowledge of him [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8).

And if we do not see a "beauty and loveliness in him for which he is to be desired" infinitely beyond everything else, our eyes must be altogether blinded by the god of this world. Let us then despise everything in comparison with him, and take him as our portion, our all in all.

2. We should be exceedingly careful that we do not grieve him.

In this also the Bride affords us an excellent example. Frequently does she repeat her tender concern lest by any means he should be provoked to depart from her, [Song of Songs 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.7); [Song of Songs 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 3.5); [Song of Songs 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 8.4). Such a holy caution also should we continually maintain. He is a holy and jealous God, and will not endure our neglects without manifesting his displeasure, [Isaiah 45:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.15). The Bride herself, notwithstanding her care in general, experienced the loss of his presence, when she became remiss, [Song of Songs 5:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.3-6). And thus will he also hide himself from us, if by our unwatchfulness we grieve his Holy Spirit.

Let us then "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." Let us "look to him as our Guardian, and beware of him, and obey his voice, and carefully abstain from every species of provocation, [Exodus 23:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.20-21)."

3. If at any time we have lost a sense of his presence, we should by all possible means immediately exert ourselves to regain it.

With what contrition did the Bride arise! How did her very soul faint within her, when she found he was departed! With what earnestness did she call after him! How did she instantly inquire after him, applying to those who from their office and character were best fitted to direct her! How did she persist, notwithstanding all the discouragements she met with! And what a solemn charge did she give to her fellow-saints to intercede for her! See each distinct step exemplified; Song of Songs 5:5-8.

Such should be our conduct under the hidings of his face. We should not sit down in despondency, but labor with more abundant diligence to obtain renewed expressions of his love and favor, [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15).

4. If he deigns to visit us again, we should feel ourselves completely happy in him, and yield up ourselves entirely to his will.

No sooner were the Bride's endeavors crowned with success, than she redoubled her efforts to retain and enjoy him, [Song of Songs 3:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 3.2-4), and earnestly sought to be most intimately, and inseparably united to him, [Song of Songs 8:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 8.1-2); [Song of Songs 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 8.6). Thus should we seek to "abide in him, and to have him abiding in us, [John 15:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.4)." We should "cleave to him with full purpose of heart," and, in the possession of his love, our souls should find all that they can desire, [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10). Thrice happy they who are thus influenced by their views of Christ! Their "labor shall never be in vain." They shall enjoy the greatest, the only real good—the light of his countenance, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6); and though in a little wrath he may hide his face from them, it shall be only for a moment, and with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on them, [Isaiah 54:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.8).

It may now be allowed us, not merely to exhort, but to "charge," you all.

In the name of Almighty God, we "charge" you all to love the Savior. If the love which believers bear to him constrains them to be singular, let it be remembered, that the blame of singularity does not rest on them; as they can "give a reason for the hope that is in them," so can they also give a reason for their love to the Savior. His transcendent excellencies demand their supreme regard. If they love him with all their heart and soul and mind and strength, it is no more than their bounden duty; yes, their most fervent affections fall infinitely short of his desert.

Let all then set their love on Jesus. Let them search out his excellencies, until they are ravished with the sight, and let them "cast their idols to the moles and to the bats." Nor let any be ashamed to confess him before men. It is a small matter to bear the taunts of an ignorant and ungodly world. One hour's enjoyment of Christ's presence will more than counterbalance an age of man's contempt; and if on earth, how much more in Heaven! Dare then to be singular. Shine, believers, as befits your relation to the heavenly Bridegroom. Be "the fairest among women," as your Beloved is among men, [Psalm 45:2-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.2-13); and let your union with him be manifested by your conformity to his image.

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THE EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST

**[Song of Songs 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16)**

"Yes! He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved; and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

With many it is a matter of surprise, that truly converted Christians should manifest such zeal in prosecuting their own ways, and in commending religion to all around them. The world see no such excellency in Christ as the true believer does; and therefore, while they cannot but acknowledge the superiority of the Christian's walk, they ask, in a tone of self-justifying confidence, "What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us? verse 9." But, if they beheld the Savior in his true character, so far would they be from wondering that his people loved and served him so ardently, that they would rather wonder at the coldness of their hearts towards him, and at the unprofitableness of their lives. To the above question the Church of old replies, in the words I have read to you; from which I shall take occasion to show,

I. The excellency of Christ.

This is set forth in highly figurative language, agreeably to the tenor of the whole book, which abounds in allegory from beginning to end. The redeemed Church marks, under very sublime images, his beauty in every part, "his head, his locks, his eyes, his cheeks, his lips, his hands, his body, his legs, his countenance, his mouth;" and proclaims him, not only "the chief among ten thousand," but "altogether lovely, verses 9-16." We will not attempt to follow the particular description here given; for we could never do justice to it. We will rather content ourselves with a general view of Christ.

1. He is altogether lovely in his **person**.

In himself he unites all the perfections of the Godhead, with every grace that can adorn humanity. "In him there was no spot or blemish;" insomuch that his bitterest enemies, after the severest possible scrutiny, were forced to confess, "We find in him no fault at all".

2. He is altogether lovely in his **offices**.

These were altogether sustained for us, and executed for us; and they are precisely such as our necessities required.

Did we need an atonement for our sins? He is our Great High Priest who offers that atonement; yes, and offers himself, too, as the sacrifice which alone was sufficient to expiate our guilt.

Did we need to be instructed relative to the way in which alone God would accept a returning sinner? He became our Prophet, to make known to us the mind and will of God, and to reveal to us inwardly, by his Spirit, what he has outwardly proclaimed to us in his Word.

Did we need to be delivered from all our spiritual enemies? He yet further assumed the Kingly office, that he might rescue us from our bondage, and make us partakers with him of all the glory and felicity of Heaven.

It is not possible to find in man a need for which provision is not made in him, to the utmost extent of our necessities; and which he will not supply to all who call upon him.

3. He is altogether lovely in all **his fellowship with his people**.

O, who can conceive the extent of his condescension and grace? How ready is he at all times:

to "draw near to those who draw near to him;"

to "manifest himself to them, as he does not unto the world;"

and to impart to them all the consolation and strength which they look for at his hands!

"In all the afflictions of his people he is himself afflicted;" and to such a degree is he "touched with the feeling of their infirmities," that every trial of theirs is felt by him as his own. "Whoever touches us, touches the apple of his eye."

In a word, there is no weakness which he will not support; no need which he will not supply; nor shall there be any bounds to his communications, except what are fixed by our capacity to receive them.

With this view of Christ's excellency, it is impossible not to connect,

II. The blessedness of those who believe in him.

Between him and his believing people there is the closest union that can be imagined.

1. Jesus stands pre-eminent in their regards.

So says the redeemed Church, "This is my Beloved." It is the Spouse that speaks; and here she claims him as her Divine Husband. Now, conceive a person excelling all others in every endowment, both of body and mind; conceive of whole nations acknowledging him as the Benefactor of the human race; and conceive of him as not only thus lauded for former benefits conferred, but as at the very time scattering in rich profusion all manner of blessings upon millions of mankind; I say, conceive that you behold such a one surrounded by applauding and adoring multitudes; and then think how happy that woman must be who can say, "This is my Beloved;" I have a right in him which no other human being has; all that he is, is mine; and all that he has, is mine! I say, my brethren, that we cannot conceive of felicity on earth greater than hers.

Yet, my brethren, this is yours, if only you believe in Christ. He is your Beloved; and you may claim precisely the same interest in him as if there were not another, either in Heaven or on earth, to claim it with you. What happiness, then, is there to be compared with yours; when it is not a mere man, however excellent, but your incarnate God himself, to whom you stand in this near, this glorious relation!

2. You also stand high in Jesus' regards.

Yes, the regard is mutual. You might possibly love one in whom there was not a reciprocal attachment. But it is not so in this case. He calls you "The dearly beloved of his soul, [Jeremiah 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 12.7)." As surely therefore as you can say, "This is my Beloved," you may add, with confidence, "This is my Friend." Yes, Jesus himself says, "I call you not servants, but friends."

Nor can you imagine any act of friendship which he will not most gladly execute for you. "Abraham was the friend of God." See, then, what God wrought for him! and know, that that, yes, and infinitely more, will the Lord Jesus Christ work for you in the time of your necessity. As our sympathetic high priest, in every time of need he will come to you:  
to counsel you by his wisdom,  
to uphold you by his power,  
and to enrich you with his benefits.

We are told that, "There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother;" truly, there is no brother in the universe, that will be so entirely at your command as he. Only apply to him, and spread your needs before him, and you shall never go away empty. On the contrary, "He will do exceeding abundantly for you, above all that you can ask or think."

Now then let me ask of you, my brethren,

1. "What Do you think of Christ?"

This was a question which Christ himself put to his disciples; and I now put it to you. You know what is said, "To those who believe, he is precious," even preciousness itself. Is he viewed in this light by you? This will determine whether you are true believers, or not; for in every believer, and in him exclusively, this grace is found. Truly, if you are really his, you will say, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you!" Your sublimest joy on earth must be to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his! [Song of Songs 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.16); [Song of Songs 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 6.3)."

2. How are you endeavoring to requite his love?

If you love Christ, it must be not in word only, but in deed and in truth.

Are you then living in the enjoyment of his presence?

Are you consecrating yourselves unreservedly to his service?

Above all, Are you seeking to grow up into his image, so that he may be as well satisfied with contemplating your relation to him, as you are in viewing his to you?

See how, in the chapter before my text, Christ views his bride, [Song of Songs 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 4.1); see how he views her with admiration, as it were, from head to foot, [Song of Songs 4:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 4.2-6); see what a blessed testimony he bears respecting her, [Song of Songs 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 4.7). Let it be your ambition so to walk before him, that he may testify the same of you; and that the union which has thus been commenced between you on earth, may be consummated in Heaven for evermore!

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THE CHRISTIAN'S RELIANCE ON CHRIST

**[Song of Songs 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 8.5)**

"Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved?"

There is an intimate and mysterious union between Christ and his redeemed Church. It is often compared, in Scripture, to a marriage union; and in the book before us, the Song of Solomon, there is a figurative representation of the fellowship which exists between Christ and his redeemed Church under this relation. A third description of people called "the daughters of Jerusalem," are occasionally introduced, to diversify the dialogue, and to enliven it by bearing their part in it. The words of the text seem to be uttered by them. The redeemed Church had, in the four preceding verses, expressed her desire after more familiar and abiding fellowship with her divine Husband; and the bystanders, admiring and felicitating her state, exclaim "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved?"

I. I will endeavor to throw light upon the words thus addressed to the redeemed Church.

There does not, indeed, appear any considerable difficulty in them; especially if we bear in mind the passage of the Israelites through the wilderness to the land of Canaan. This world may fitly be represented as "a wilderness".

That through which the Israelites passed is called:  
"a waste howling wilderness, [Deuteronomy 32:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.10);"  
"a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death, [Jeremiah 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.6);"  
a land "wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions; and drought, where there was no water, [Deuteronomy 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.15)."

And such, indeed, is this vain world to the weary pilgrim. It affords nothing for the comfort and refreshment of a heavy-laden soul; but furnishes:  
obstructions without number,  
snares at every step, and  
enemies filled with the most envenomed hostility!

Through this wilderness world, the Christian is passing in his way to Heaven.

He has, of necessity, his duties to perform, like other men. But "though in the world, he is not of the world, [John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6)." He does not regard this world as his rest; but merely as a country through which he must go, towards "that better country which he is seeking after." He accounts himself a "pilgrim and a stranger upon earth, [Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13);" and advances on his journey with all practical expedition, "not setting his affections on anything along the way, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2)," but looking forward to the termination of his labors in the eternal world.

While traveling through this wilderness world, "he leans upon his beloved" Savior for support.

He feels his insufficiency for the work he has to perform; but "he knows in whom he has believed, that he is able to sustain him, and to keep that which he has committed to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)." No sick or enfeebled traveler places a more entire dependence on one who has undertaken to bear him onward, than the Christian does on Christ, who has engaged to perform this office, saying, "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you! [Isaiah 46:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.4)." He would account it a most heinous offence if for a moment he should "trust to an arm of flesh, [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5);" and with a holy indignation at the thought of placing any confidence in the creature, he says, "Ashur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands: You are our gods; for in you the fatherless finds mercy! [Hosea 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.3)."

In a word, the whole habit of the Christian's mind, throughout this dreary wilderness, is that which the holy Psalmist addressed to his Lord and Savior, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps do not slip!" "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

II. Next, I will endeavor to point out more particularly the force of the interrogation.

I should say, that, in its strictest sense, it appears to express admiration; but we may very properly consider it as:

1. The language of **inquiry**.

"Who is this?" Is there, among ourselves, anyone answering to this character?

Ask yourselves, "Am I this blessed person?"

Do I so live in this world, that others notice the peculiarity of my walk, and my entire devotion to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

Do I, instead of loving the world, account it a dreary wilderness?

Do I renounce all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh?

"Am I daily dying unto the world"—to its cares, its pleasures, its maxims, its habits, its friendship?

Am I "crucified unto the world, and is the world crucified unto me by the cross of Christ," so that I value it no more than a man does who is in the very throes of death? [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)

In my passage through this wilderness, am I leaning constantly on my beloved Savior, saying, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength!" [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)

This is, indeed, the character of the true Christian; and we are commanded to "examine ourselves, whether we are in the faith, and to prove our own selves [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)." I would entreat you, therefore, to make this a subject of most serious inquiry; and to ask yourselves, "Am I the person characterized in the words of our text?"

2. The language of **admiration**.

This I suppose to be the more immediate feeling expressed in my text. And truly a person so circumstanced as the Bride here was, is one of the greatest wonders upon earth. Conceive yourselves to be that person:

that such an earthly and sensual creature, as every one of you must know yourselves to be, should so renounce the world!

that such a polluted creature should enjoy such intimacy with the Lord of Glory!

that such a weak creature should persevere, in despite of so many obstacles both within and without!

May not such a one well say, "I am a wonder unto many! [Psalm 71:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 71.7)." Must he not, above all, be a wonder to himself? "Who am I that I should be so honored; while the world at large are left to walk after the imaginations of their own evil hearts, and to "live as without God in the world!"

3. The language of **commendation**.

No man in the universe is so to be encouraged, as he who dies to the world, and seeks all his happiness in Christ. Think with yourselves from what imminent danger he has escaped. "The whole world is lying in wickedness! [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19)," and will be condemned at last! 1 Corinthians 11:32. But "he has been taken out of the world, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)," and been delivered from it, even as Lot from Sodom. Is not he a fit object for encouragement?

But consider, further, to what a glorious place he is hastening; even to Heaven itself, where he shall speedily possess "an unfading, incorruptible and undefiled inheritance! [1 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4)."

Behold, too, to what a blessed company he is joined! "He is come to an innumerable company of angels; and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in Heaven; and to God, the Judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; and to all these, as his everlasting companions."

Think, also, how near he is to all this felicity, every day and hour bearing him towards it, as fast as the wings of time can carry him.

And above all, what an all-sufficient support the true Christian has in this barren and howling wilderness! His ever-present Savior shields him and cares for him; and guards him as the apple of his eye! His beloved Lord Jesus, "is able to keep him from falling, and to present him faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy!" Jude verse 24

Tell me, Who is happy in comparison with him? Who is to be commended, if he is not?

Is there here a weak believer, who doubts whether such a one as he can ever attain this blessedness?

Let him trust in Christ, and not be afraid; for none ever perished, who trusted in Him. As for a man's own weakness and insufficiency, that can be no bar to his attainment of this felicity; since the Lord Jesus Christ is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him! [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25);" and he has expressly told us, that "he will carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11)." Only take care that he is for you; and then you may hurl defiance at all that are against you.

But is there any backslider that is turning back to the world?

O, think what you are doing; and what tremendous evils you are bringing upon your soul! What has this vain world ever done for you, that it should influence you by its attractions? And what has Christ not done for you, while you sought him, and relied upon him! Hear his complaint against you, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel—a land of darkness! Why do my people say, We are lords; we will come no more unto you [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31)." The world has been a wilderness to you, at all times; but has Christ been so? Has he been so at any moment, when you sought your happiness in him? Hear, and tremble at the warning given to you by an inspired Apostle, "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome (a case that too frequently occurs), the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them! [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)."

Is there one in such an unhappy state as this? "Who is he?" Let every one inquire, "Lord, is it I?" And whoever he may be, let us all regard him as an object of the deepest commiseration. May the Lord awaken all such before it is too late!

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THE REDEEMED CHURCH'S DESIRE FOR CHRIST'S LOVE

**[Song of Songs 8:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 8.6-7)**

"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which has a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." KJV

"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned!" NIV

The more any person enjoys of Christ, the more ardent will be his desires after him, and the more enlarged his petitions for richer communications from him. The redeemed Church, as represented in the song before us, has already been brought into the closest fellowship with her Beloved; yet this, so far from satisfying her, serves only for an occasion of soliciting from him yet further favors, and urging her request with more powerful pleas, "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned!"

I. The redeemed Church's **request**.

To fix the import of this, we must determine the precise sense in which the Bride uses the word, "seal." In the general acceptance of that term in Scripture, we understand that which is affixed to deeds or covenants of any kind, in order to ratify and confirm them. Such was that with which Jeremiah's purchase of a field was confirmed, [Jeremiah 32:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.10-11); [Jeremiah 32:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.14). And in reference to such was circumcision appointed to Abraham, as the seal of God's covenant with him, and of the righteousness which he, by faith in that covenant, already possessed, [Romans 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.11); while, on the other hand, God's foreknowledge and fore-ordination of his elect is a seal on his part, attesting that that covenant stands on a sure and immoveable foundation! [2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19).

In a similar sense, the Holy Spirit's work in sanctifying the elect is a seal, whereby he seals them unto the day of redemption, and assures to them their enjoyment of their purchased inheritance! [Ephesians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13); [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30).

But we apprehend that the use of the term in this place is different; and that it refers to signets which were commonly worn upon the hand or arm, as memorials of people who were greatly beloved. Such we find mentioned by the Prophet Jeremiah, "As surely as I live," declares the LORD, "even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off, [Jeremiah 22:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 22.24)"—utterly unmindful of all my former regards. In this view the redeemed Church's request is, that her Beloved would make her the object of his most endeared affections, and of his continual care. Now,

This is a proper request from every man.

All without exception are invited to come to Christ, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37), and to participate freely his richest blessings, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1). Unworthiness on our part is no bar to our acceptance with him; since all, however elevated and ennobled afterwards, are, previously to their union with him, in the lowest state of guilt and degradation! [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19), [Ezekiel 16:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.3-12).

He, and all his benefits, are to be apprehended simply by faith, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12). Whoever comes to him by faith is united to him, as a branch to the vine [John 15:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1-5), and may expect to receive out of his fullness all that has been treasured up in him for our use and benefit, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7).

We may ask for the entire affections of his soul, and the unlimited exercise of his power, as if there were no other creature in the universe to share his regards. Less than this we ought not to ask. Less than this would not avail for our eternal happiness. We must have all the love of his heart, and all the power of his arm, if we would be brought through all our difficulties and trials, to the everlasting enjoyment of him in his kingdom. Whatever the most beloved Bride may hope for from him to whom she is betrothed, that, and infinitely more, may we expect from our heavenly Bridegroom.

This request shall be fulfilled to all who offer it in spirit and in truth.

Christ has solemnly pledged himself to this extent by an everlasting covenant, [Jeremiah 32:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40-41). And he has fulfilled it to millions of the human race, who were once as guilty, as polluted, and as helpless as we! Hence he chides the Church for her doubts, after that he had engraved her on the palms of his hands, [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16); Who can tell the efficacy of fervent and believing prayer? Our God and Savior could as soon deny himself, as he could withstand it. Instead of rejecting our petitions on account of their being too large, he will approve of them the more, and answer them the sooner, on account of their comprehensiveness and extent. He has said, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10);" "You may ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you! [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14)."

We shall, however, be more certain of success, if we can follow her in,

II. The redeemed Church's **pleas**.

Two things in particular she urged on the consideration of her Beloved, in order to prevail on him to grant her request.

The one was that she could not endure the thought of having a less interest in him than her relation to him required, yes, that her "jealousy would burn like coals of fire that had a most vehement flame!"

The other was, that her love to him was supreme and unalterable; that it was "stronger than death;" that "no waters could quench it, no floods drown it;" and that, if the richest monarch in the universe would "give all the substance of his house" to engage it for himself, "it would be utterly scorned!"

Now in these pleas we see,

1. What **distress** is occasioned by a doubt of Christ's love to us.

To have it a doubtful point whether we are children of God and heirs of Heaven, or children of the wicked one and heirs of Hell—is a source of unutterable anguish to every man who knows what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God! [Hebrews 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.31)."

How bitterly did Job bewail his condition, while he apprehended God to be his enemy! "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)."

David likewise in many of his Psalms pours out similar complaints, [Psalm 42:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-3); [Psalm 77:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.1-4); [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9); [Psalm 88:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.1-7); [Psalm 102:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.1-6); [Psalm 102:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.9-11).

Careless and ungodly men can rest satisfied without any inquiries; but a spiritually awakened man cannot be so indifferent about his saving interest in Christ; to him suspense is death; he feels "a jealousy cruel as the grave," (which will never allow its destined victim to escape,) and devouring, like a flame, which consumes all within its reach.

2. What **consolation** arises from a consciousness of our love to him.

Though there is no merit in our love to Christ, it greatly emboldens us in our addresses to him, and gives us a just ground to hope, that he will in due time manifest his love to us, and shed it abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He has expressly said, "I love those who love me [Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.17)." He has assured us that, "if we love him, his Father will love us, and come and make his abode with us, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." The very circumstance of our love to him is of itself, independent of all other evidences, a proof that he does actually love us; for our love to him is the effect of his love to us, "We love him, because he first loved us, [1 John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.10); [1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.19) and [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16)." Yes, "He loved us with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn us! [Jeremiah 33:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 33.3)."

If then we have within ourselves an evidence, that our love to him is supreme, and that nothing which the world could either offer to us, or inflict upon us, would induce us to surrender our hope in him—then we may rest assured, not only that he is ours, but that he will be ours even to the end. We may even make this an argument with him in prayer, as David did, "I am yours; save me! [Psalm 119:94](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.94)." And as the Church of old did, "Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people! [Isaiah 64:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.8-9)."

Bearing us, as he does, on his shoulders, and on his bosom, in his official capacity as our High Priest within the veil, [Exodus 28:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.9-12); [Exodus 28:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.21); [Exodus 28:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.29-30), we may be sure that "he will never leave us nor forsake us, [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5)," nor ever allow anything to "separate us from his love [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39).

**Learn** from hence,

1. What should be the frame of your minds towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our hearts should be supremely set on him, and we should "count all things but loss for the knowledge of him." So ardent should our love to him be, that no floods of affliction or persecution should ever be able to drown it, nor all that the world can give stand for a moment in competition with it! Examine yourselves, brethren, and see whether it is really so? Can you, in answer to the question put by our Lord to Peter, make the reply that Peter did, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you!"

2. What we should daily look for at his hands.

Your security and happiness depend altogether upon his unchanging love for you. Were he to withdraw from underneath you his everlasting arms, you would instantly fall and perish. Entreat him then to "carry you in his bosom," and to "bear you still as upon eagles' wings." Plead with him in earnest prayer; and let him not go until he bestow his blessing upon you. "You are not straitened in him; be not straitened in your own affections;" and let all the fellowship which you enjoy with him here on earth, be regarded by you as a pledge of still closer fellowship with him in the regions of eternal light and blessedness!