Pithy gems from Thomas Watson

(1620 – 1686)



Courtesy www.gracegems.org

Eternity to the godly—is a day that has no sunset.
Eternity to the wicked—is a night that has no sunrise.

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There is more evil in a drop of sin—than in a sea of affliction!

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Knowledge without repentance—will be but a torch to light men to Hell.

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The pleasure of sin is soon gone—but the sting remains!

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There are millions who would rather go sleeping to Hell—than sweating to Heaven!

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Sin has the devil for its father, shame for its companion, and death for its wages!

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A weak faith can lay hold on a strong Christ.

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God takes away the world—that the heart may cleave more to Him in sincerity.

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Christ is never sweet—until sin is felt to be bitter.

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What fools are they who, for a drop of pleasure, drink a sea of wrath!

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Every time you draw your breath, you suck in mercy!

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We are more sure to arise out of our graves, than out of our beds.

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A man may be said to be given to covetousness when he takes more pains for getting earth than for getting Heaven.

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Read the Scripture, not only as a history, but as a love-letter sent to you from God!

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God would have us part with nothing for Him, but that which will damn us if we keep it! The only design He has for us is to make us happy.

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Death is the last and best physician. It cures all diseases and sins—the aching head and the unbelieving heart. Sin was the midwife which brought death into the world—and death shall be the grave to bury sin! O the privilege of a believer!

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Whoever brings an affliction—it is God who sends it.

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Our murmuring is the devil's music.

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First we practice sin, then defend it, then boast of it.

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What if we have more of the rough file, if we have less rust!
Afflictions carry away nothing but the dross of sin.

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Christ's gleanings are better than the world's vintage.

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God sweetens outward pain—with inward peace.

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Christ went more willingly to the cross—than we do to the throne of grace.

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When God calls a man, He does not repent of it. God does not, as many friends do: love one day—and hate another; or as princes, who make their subjects favorites, and afterwards throw them into prison. This is the blessedness of a saint—his condition admits of no alteration. God's call is founded upon His decree—and His decree is immutable. Acts of grace cannot be reversed. God blots out His people's sins—but not their names.

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It was wonderful love that Christ should rather die for us—than for the angels that fell. They were creatures of a more noble extract, and in all probability might have brought greater revenues of glory to God—yet that Christ should pass by those golden vessels, and make us clods of earth into stars of glory—Oh, the hyperbole of Christ's love!

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Christ heals with more ease than any other. Christ makes the devil go out with a word (Mark 9:25). Nay, he can cure with a look—Christ's look melted Peter into repentance; it was a healing look. If Christ does but cast a look upon the soul he can recover it. Therefore David prays to have a look from God, 'Look upon me, and be merciful unto me' (Psalm 119:132).

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Thus it is in Hell—they would die—but they cannot. The wicked shall be always dying—but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends forever and ever. Oh! who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word "FOREVER!" breaks the heart. Wicked men do now think the Sabbaths long, and think a prayer long—but oh! how long will it be to lie in Hell forever and ever?

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If a wicked man seems to have peace at death, it is not from the knowledge of his happiness—but from the ignorance of his danger.

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Death does but take away our life from us, but sin takes away our God from us. So we see that sin is worse than death.

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Prayer as it comes from the saint is weak and languid; but when the arrow of a saint's prayer is put into the bow of Christ's intercession—it pierces the throne of grace!

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Prayer delights God's ear. It melts His heart—and opens His hand. God cannot deny a praying soul.

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The torments of Hell abide forever. If all the earth and sea were sand, and every thousandth year a little bird should come, and take away one grain of this sand—it would be a long time before that vast heap of sand were emptied. Yet, if after all that time the damned may come out of Hell, there were some hope; but this word FOREVER breaks the heart.

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Affliction may be lasting—but it is not everlasting. Affliction has a sting—but withal a wing—sorrow shall soon fly away.

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A man may be said to be given to covetousness when he takes more pains for getting earth than for getting Heaven.

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Better have men reproach you for being godly—than have God damn you for being wicked. Be not laughed out of your religion. If a lame man laughs at you for walking upright, will you therefore limp?

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A spiritual prayer is a humble prayer. Prayer is the asking of an alms, which requires humility. The lower the heart descends—the higher the prayer ascends.

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It is absurd to think that anything in us could have the least influence upon our election. Some say that God foresaw that such persons would believe, and therefore chose them; so they would make the business of salvation to depend upon something in us. Whereas God does not choose us for faith—but to faith. "He has chosen us, that we should be holy" (Ephesians 1:4), not because we would be holy—but that we might be holy. We are elected to holiness, not for it.

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Knowledge is the eye which must direct the foot of obedience.

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Make up your spiritual accounts daily; see how matters stand between God and your souls (Psalm 77:6). Frequent reckonings keep God and conscience friends. Do with your hearts as you do with your watches—wind them up every morning by prayer, and at night examine whether your hearts have gone true all that day, whether the wheels of your affections have moved swiftly toward Heaven.

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God will not be behind-hand in love to us. For our drop—we shall receive an ocean!

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The right manner of spiritual growth, is to grow less in one's own eyes.

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Praising God is one of the highest and purest acts of religion. In prayer we act like men—but in praise we act like angels.

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How many souls have been blown into Hell with the wind of popular applause?

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Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God's Will. God did not choose us because we were worthy—but by choosing us, He makes us worthy.

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There is justice in Hell—but sin is the most unjust thing. It would rob God of His glory, Christ of His purchase, the soul of its happiness.

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To know that nothing hurts the godly, is a matter of comfort. But to be assured that all things which happen shall co-operate for their good, that their crosses shall be turned into blessings, that showers of affliction water the withering root of their grace and make it flourish more—this may fill their hearts with joy until they run over!

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God will fill the hungry, because He Himself has stirred up the hunger. As in the case of prayer, when God prepares the heart to pray, He prepares His ear to hear (Psalm 10:17). So in the case of spiritual hunger, when God prepares the heart to hunger, He will prepare His hand to fill.

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Those prayers God likes best, which come seething hot from the heart!

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Prayer is the offering up of our desires to God in the name of Christ, for such things as are agreeable to His will. It is an offering of our desires. Desires are the soul and life of prayer—words are but the body. Now as the body without the soul is dead—so are prayers unless they are animated with our desires.

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The angel fetched Peter out of prison—but it was prayer that fetched the angel.

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Keep your heart as you would keep a garden. Your heart is a garden (Song of Solomon 4:12); weed all sin out of your heart. Among the flowers of the heart, weeds will be growing—the weeds of pride, malice, and covetousness: these grow without planting and cultivating. Therefore be weeding your heart daily by prayer, examination, and repentance.

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The door of Heaven is always open for the prayers of God's people.

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Prayer is the soul's breathing itself into the bosom of its heavenly Father.

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The prayer that is faithless, is fruitless.

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It is hard to carry a full cup without spilling—and a full estate without sinning.

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The godly have some good in them—therefore the devil afflicts them;
and some evil in them—therefore God afflicts them.

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The more we enjoy of God—the more we are ravished with delight.

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A man's greatest care should be for that place where he lives longest—therefore eternity should be his scope.

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God's decree is the very pillar and basis on which the saint's perseverance depends. That decree ties the knot of adoption so fast, that neither sin, death, nor Hell, can break it asunder.

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He may look on death with joy—who can look on forgiveness with faith.

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We spend our years with sighing—it is a valley of tears. Death is the funeral of all our sorrows.

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The world rings changes, it is never constant but in its disappointments. The world is but a great inn, where we are to stay a night or two, and ate gone. What madness is it so to set our heart upon our inn—as to forget our home?

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He who loves the world—how active is he! He will break his peace and sleep for it. He who loves honor—what hazards will he run! He will swim to the throne in blood. Love Heaven—and you cannot miss it; love breaks through all opposition—it takes Heaven by storm.

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None are so empty of grace—as he who thinks he is full.

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How soon are we broken on the soft pillow of ease! Adam in paradise was overcome—when Job on the dunghill was a conqueror!

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The more we grow in grace—the more we shall flourish in glory.
Though every vessel of glory is full—yet some vessels hold more.

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God takes away the world—that the heart may cleave more to Him in sincerity.

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The growth of grace is the best evidence of the existence of grace in the heart. Things which have no life, will not grow.

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God sweetens outward pain—with inward peace.

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A man's greatest care should be for that place where he lives longest—therefore eternity should be his scope.

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Where reason cannot wade—there faith may swim.

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The Kingdom of grace leads to the Kingdom of glory.

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The right manner of spiritual growth, is to grow less in one's own eyes.

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Millions would rather go sleeping to Hell—than sweating to Heaven!

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In Hell, they desire to die—but they cannot. The wicked shall be always dying—but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends forever and ever. Oh! who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word "forever" breaks the heart! Wicked men do now think the Sabbaths long, and think a prayer long—but oh! how long will it be to lie in Hell forever and ever?

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True faith will trust God's heart—where it cannot trace His hand!

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To render evil for evil, is brutish;
to render evil for good, is devilish;
to render good for evil, is Christian.

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Christ will not throw away His pearls, for every speck of dirt!

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The world is a flattering enemy, it kills by embracing. Whom the world kisses, it betrays.
Is Heaven in your eye, and Christ in your heart, and the world under your feet?

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Do not so look upon your troubles—as to forget your mercies.

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He who is proud of his knowledge—the devil cares not how much he knows!

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Christ shed tears, for those who shed His blood!

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God loves a broken heart—not a divided heart.

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'Tis vain to speak of hopes of salvation—and yet have the marks of damnation!
It will be so much the worse to go to Hell, with hopes of Heaven.

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An idle person is a fit subject for the devil to work upon. Satan watches his time, and when we least suspect, then he throws in a temptation.

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Look upon a humble Savior—and let your plumes of pride fall off.

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Such sheep as have most wool, are soonest fleeced.

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The higher the lark flies—the sweeter the songs.
Did our thoughts dwell above—we would live sweeter lives.

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Heaven is a place where sorrow cannot live, and joy cannot die.

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Immorality begins with infidelity.

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Prayer keeps the heart open to God, and shut to sin.

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Prosperity exposes to much evil.
It is hard to carry a full cup without spilling—and a full estate without sinning.
Many pray Agur's first prayer, "Give me not poverty."
Few pray his last prayer, "Give me not riches" (Proverbs 30:8).

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At Christ's death "the rocks split." Not to be affected with Christ's dying love, is to have hearts harder than rocks!

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The Lord has a golden scepter, and an iron rod.
Those who will not bow to the one, will be broken by the other!

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He who believes not in the blood of the Lamb—must feel the wrath of the Lamb.

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Sin unrepented of, ends in a tragedy. It has . . .
   the devil for its father,
   shame for its companion,
   and damnation for its wages!

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A sinner's heart is the devil's mansion-house.
"I will return unto my house" (Matthew 12:44).

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A true Christian carries Christ in his heart, and the cross on his shoulders.

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Christ and his cross are never parted, for it is too much for the Christian to have two heavens—one here, and one hereafter.

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Those who bear the cross patiently, shall wear the crown triumphantly.

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Christ sweetens all our comforts, and sanctifies all our crosses.

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God's power makes Him mighty,
His mercy makes Him lovely—but
His holiness makes Him glorious. "Glorious in holiness."
Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of Jehovah's diadem!

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A man can go to Hell for not forgiving, as for not believing! Our forgiving others is not a cause of God's forgiving us, but it is a condition without which He will not forgive us. Matthew 6:12-15

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Would it not be an encouragement to a subject, to hear his prince say to him, "You will honor and please me very much, if you will go to yonder mine of gold, and dig as much gold for yourself as you can carry away"?
Just so, for God to say, "Go to the Word and dig out as much grace as you can! The more holiness and happiness you have, the more I shall count Myself glorified!"

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The Scripture is both the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born, but by "the word of truth"? (James 1:18). How does he grow, but by "the sincere milk of the Word"? ( Peter 2:2).

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The natural man may have excellent religious notions, but God must teach us to know the mysteries of the Gospel after a spiritual manner. A man may see the figures upon a dial, but he cannot tell how the day goes unless the sun shines. In the same way, we may read many truths in the Bible, but we cannot know them savingly, until God by His Spirit shines upon our soul. He not only informs our mind, but inclines our will.

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The Scripture is to be its own interpreter, or rather the Spirit speaking in it. Nothing can cut the diamond. In the same way, nothing can interpret Scripture but Scripture.

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Satan loves to fish in the troubled waters of a discontented heart.

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Faith is to prayer, what the feather is to the arrow.

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It is more honor to bury an injury, than to revenge it.

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Since God has a Son of his own, and such a Son—how wonderful God's love in adopting us! We needed a Father—but He did not need sons.

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Adoption is a greater mercy than Adam had in paradise.

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A man adopts one for his son and heir, who does not at all resemble him. But whoever God adopts for His child resembles Him; he not only bears His heavenly Father's name, but His image! (Colossians 3:10).

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We may force our Lord to punish us, but we will never have to force Him to love us.

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God would never permit any evil, if he could not bring good out of evil.

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It must not be expected that the devil will let those rest, who are laboring to destroy his kingdom!

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Most men pray more for full purses, than for pure hearts.

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Behold, what manner of love is this, that the curse should be laid on His head—and the crown set on ours.

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The glory of God is the silver thread which must run through all of our actions.

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God's center is everywhere, His circumference is nowhere.

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God is more willing to pardon, than to punish.
There is more mercy in Him, than sin in us!

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The mercies of God make a sinner proud, but a saint humble.

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Take heed of abusing this mercy of God. To sin because mercy abounds, is the devil's logic! He who sins because of God's mercy, shall have judgment without mercy!

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Mercy is not for those who sin and fear not, but for those who fear and sin not.

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Christians, you who are vessels of election—were by nature as wicked as others—but God had compassion on you and plucked you as brands out of the fire! He stopped you in your course of sinning—when you were marching to Hell! He turned you back to Him by sincere repentance. Oh, here is the banner of love displayed over you!

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The water is useful for the sailing of the ship—all the danger is when the water gets into the ship. All the danger to us, is when the world gets into the heart.

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Our narrow thoughts can no more comprehend the Trinity in Unity, than a nut-shell will hold all the water in the sea! This sacred doctrine is not against reason, but above it.

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The godly have some good in them, therefore the devil afflicts them. They have some evil in them, therefore God afflicts them.

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No creature but man willingly murders itself.

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The world can create trouble in peace, but God can create peace in trouble.

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The sins of the godly are worse than others, because they bring a greater reproach upon God. For the wicked to sin, is to be expected from them—swine will wallow in the mire. But when sheep do so, when the godly sin—that redounds to the dishonor of the Gospel! "By this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."

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Little sins unrepented of, will damn you as well as greater sins. Not only great rivers fall into the sea, but little brooks. In the same way, not only greater sins carry men to Hell, but lesser sins.

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Let them fear death, who do not fear sin!

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The jewel of assurance is best kept in the cabinet of a humble heart.

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It is one heart-quieting consideration in all the afflictions that befall us, that God has a special hand in them: "The Almighty has afflicted me." Instruments can no more stir until God gives them a commission—than the axe can cut without a hand. Job eyed God in his affliction. He does not say, "The Lord gave, and the devil took away," but "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away."

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Afflictions add to the saints' glory. The more the diamond is cut, the more it sparkles. In the same way, the heavier the saints' cross is, the heavier will be their crown.

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By delay of repentance, sin strengthens, and the heart hardens. The longer ice freezes, the harder it is to be broken.

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Those who deny Christ to be God, must greatly twist, or else deny the Scripture to be the Word of God.

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The best time to converse with God is before worldly distractions stand knocking at the door to be let in. The morning is, as it were, the cream of the day. Let the cream be taken off, and let God have it. Wind up your heart towards Heaven in the beginning of the day, and it will go the better all the day after. He who loses his heart in the morning in the world, will hardly find it again all the day!

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We are elected to holiness, not for it.

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When sin is your burden, Christ will be your delight!

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Faith is seated in the understanding, as well as the will. It has an eye to see Christ, as well as a wing to fly to Christ.

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Faith is full of good works. It believes as if it did not work, and it works as if it did not believe.

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As more are killed with wine, than poison—so more are hurt by lawful things than unlawful things.
Gross sins affright us, but how many are damned by using lawful things inordinately. Recreation is lawful, eating and drinking are lawful—but many sin by excess, and their table is a snare. Relations are lawful—but how often does Satan tempt us to over-love them! How often is the wife and child put in God's place! Excess makes things lawful become sinful.

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Wicked men seem to bear great reverence to departed saints. They canonize dead saints, but persecute living saints!

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There is nothing that would render the true religion more lovely, or make more proselytes to it—than to see its professors tied together with the heart-strings of love.

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God has given us two ears, but one tongue—to show that we should be swift to hear, but slow to speak. God has set a double fence before the tongue, the teeth and the lips—to teach us to be careful that we do not sin with our tongue.

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It argues more grace to grieve for the sins of others than for our own. We may grieve for our own sins out of fear of Hell, but to grieve for the sins of others is from a principle of love to God.

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Be not only attentive in hearing, but retentive after hearing.

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Take heed of drowsiness in hearing the Word preached; drowsiness shows much irreverence. How lively are many when they are about the world—but in the worship of God how drowsy! In the preaching of the Word, is not the bread of life broken to you; and will a man fall asleep at his food?

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Murmuring is the rising up of oneself against God.
It sets oneself against God, as if I am wiser than He.

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Associate with sanctified people. They may by their counsel, prayers, and holy example, be a means to make you holy.

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The more labor you have put forth for the Kingdom of Heaven, the more degrees of glory you shall have. As there are degrees of torment in Hell, so there are degrees of glory in Heaven (Matthew 23:14). As one star differs from another in glory, so shall one saint (1 Corinthians 15:41). Though every vessel of mercy shall be full—yet one may hold more than another.

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None ever complained of serving God—it was their comfort on their death-bed.

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Soon the battle will be over. It will not be long before the day will come when Satan will no longer trouble us. There will be no more deception, temptation, accusation, or confrontation. Our warfare will be over and our commander, Jesus Christ, will call us away from the battlefield to receive the victor's crown.

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The Scripture is the library of the Holy Spirit; it is the synopsis of divine knowledge, an exact model of true religion. The Scripture contains in it the credenda, "the things which we are to believe"—and the agenda, "the things which we are to practice."

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Satan tempts to sin under a pretense of religion. He is most to be feared when he transforms himself into an angel of light. He came to Christ with Scripture in his mouth: "It is written." The devil baits his hook with religion!

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Satan does not tempt God's children because they have sin in them, but because they have grace in them. Had they no grace, the devil would not disturb them. Though to be tempted is a trouble—yet to think why you are tempted is a comfort.

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Idleness tempts the devil to tempt us!

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There is a great deal of difference between falling into a temptation, and running into a temptation. The falling into a temptation shall work for good, not the running into it. He who falls into a river is capable of help and pity, but he who desperately turns into it is guilty of his own death!

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Prayer delights God's ear.
Prayer melts His heart.
Prayer opens His hand.

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Plead with Him earnestly, and either He will remove your affliction, or remove your impatience.

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God being an infinite fullness, there is no fear of want for any of the heirs of Heaven.

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That grace is tried gold, which can stand in the fiery trial and withstand fiery darts.

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He who loses his heart in the morning, in the world, will hardly find it again all the remainder of the day.

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Though our sins go up to Heaven as the smoke of a furnace, yet Christ's prayers go up as incense.

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God's vials of indignation are not poured out while the sluices of prayer are open.

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When the heart is so full of grief that it can only groan in prayer, yet God hears even my groans. "All my longings lie open before You, O Lord; my groaning is not hidden from You." Psalm 38:9

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It is easy to turn white into scarlet, but not so easy to turn scarlet into white. Yet God has promised the repentant sinner to turn his scarlet sins into pure whiteness, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." Isaiah 1:18

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It is better to go with difficulty to Heaven, than with ease to Hell!

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What good will it do a man when he is in Hell, that others think he has gone to Heaven?

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Sin has four stings: shame, guilt, horror, death.

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Godliness consists in an exact harmony between holy principles and practices.

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Can the unrepentant sinner be merry, who is heir to all God's curses, and does not know how soon he may take up his lodgings among the damned?

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In Adam we all suffered shipwreck, and repentance is the only plank left us after shipwreck to swim to Heaven.

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The more bitterness we taste in sin, the more sweetness we shall taste in Christ!

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Christ is never sincerely loved, until sin is sincerely loathed!

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Is not he a fool, who minds his recreation more than his salvation?

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Either sin must drown, or the soul must burn!

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The greatest judgment God lays upon man in this life is to let him sin without hindrance.

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He who hides one rebel in his house is a traitor to the Crown, and he who indulges one sin is a traitorous hypocrite.

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What a vast difference is there between the first covenant and the second! In the first covenant it was, if you commit sin you die; in the second covenant it is, if you confess sin you shall have mercy.

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Persecuted godliness, is far better than prosperous wickedness.

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None will find it more difficult to repent than the hypocrite.

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Loving of sin, is worse than committing it.

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A gracious soul labors to make the worst of his sins, but hypocrites make the best of them. Hypocrites do not deny they are sinners, but the do what they can to lessen their sins.

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A man without Scripture knowledge is . . .
as a workman without his hands,
as a painter without his eyes,
as a traveler without his legs,
as a ship without sails,
a bird without wings, or
like a body without a soul.

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Sin is a debt. Of all the debts we owe, our sins are the worst! Death frees a man from other debts, but it will not free him from this.

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Every step forward in sin, is a step backward from God.

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Godliness is the sacred impression and workmanship of God in a man, whereby from being carnal he is made spiritual.

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Godly sorrow is sorrow for the offence, rather than for the punishment.
It is one thing to confess sin, and another to abhor sin. The Christian has arrived at a sufficient measure of sorrow when the love of sin is purged out.
Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.

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True happiness consists—not in beauty, honor, riches (the world's trinity), but in the forgiveness of sin. (Psalm 32:1)

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He who is afraid of submitting any religious question to the test of free discussion, is more in love with his own opinion than with truth.