Pithy gems from the Puritan John Owen!

(1616–1683)

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www.gracegems.org
The more I see of the glory of Christ—the more the painted beauties of this world wither in my eyes.

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The seed of every sin—is in every heart!

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In the divine Scriptures, there are shallows and there are deeps.
Shallows where the lamb may wade—and deeps where the elephant may swim.

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Never was sin seen to be more abominably sinful, than when the burden of it was upon the shoulders of the Son of God! Would you, then, see the true demerit of sin? Take the measure of it from the cross of Christ!

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A holy life does not exclude temptations. When we say a tree is firmly rooted—we do not say the wind never blows upon it.

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Sin is never less quiet—than when it seems to be most quiet.

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Nothing shall be lost—which is done for God or in obedience to Him.

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God can make the dry parched ground of my soul—to become as a refreshing pool. He can make my thirsty barren heart—to become as springs of water. Yes he can make my heart—this habitation of dragons which is so full of abominable lusts and fiery temptations—to be a place of bounty and fruitfulness unto Himself!

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I would fix all my thoughts and desires on Christ's glory. The more I see of the glory of Christ—the more the painted beauties of this world will wither in my eyes—and the more I will be crucified to this world. It will become to me like something dead and putrid, impossible for me to enjoy.

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He who has slight thoughts of sin—never had great thoughts of God.

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Satan's greatest strategy, is in making people think they have plenty of time before they die to consider their eternal welfare.

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The first and principal duty of a pastor—is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the Word.

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He who prays as he ought—will endeavor to live as he prays.

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We all profess that we are bound for Heaven, immortality and glory. But is there any evidence that we really desire to go there—if all our thoughts are consumed about the trifles of this world, which we must leave behind us—and we have only occasional thoughts of things above?

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Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world—therefore it is always to be mortified. Do you mortify sin—do you make it your daily work? Be killing sin—or it will be killing you!

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Christ greatly delights in His redeemed people—and they greatly delight in Him.

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Christ's blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls!

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We are never nearer Christ—than when we find ourselves lost in a holy amazement at His unspeakable love!

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I do not understand how a man can be a true believer—in whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow and trouble!

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We shall not benefit from reading the Old Testament—unless we look for and meditate on the glory of Christ in its pages.

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Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness—who does not walk over the bellies of his lusts. He who does not kill sin in this way—takes no steps toward his journey's end.

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The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin—ought to make it their business all their days, to mortify the indwelling power of sin!

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The most tremendous judgment of God in this world—is the hardening of the hearts of men.

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Let no man pretend to fear sin—who does not fear temptation also! These two are too closely united to be separated. He does not truly hate the fruit—who delights in the root.

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The habit of sinning, takes away the sense of it.
The course of the world, takes away the shame of it.

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Believers know that all their duties are weak, imperfect, and unable to abide in God's presence. Therefore they look to Christ as the one who . . .
  bears the iniquity of their holy things,
  adds incense to their prayers,
  gathers out all the weeds from their duties—and makes them acceptable to God.

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What do we want? What do our souls desire? Is it not that we might have a more full, clear, stable comprehension of the wisdom, love, grace, goodness, holiness, righteousness, and power of God—as declared and exemplified in Christ!

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A man may take the measure of his growth or decay in grace—according to his thoughts and meditations upon the person of Christ, and the glory of His Kingdom, and of His love.

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If our principal treasure is in spiritual and heavenly things, as we profess—then our affections, and consequently our desires and thoughts, will be principally fixed on them.

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All that may be known of God for our salvation, especially His wisdom, love, goodness, grace and mercy on which the life of our souls depends—are represented to us in all their splendor in and through Christ. No wonder then that Christ is glorious in the eyes of believers!

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If we would talk less and pray more about them—things would be better than they are in the world. At least, we would be better enabled to bear them.

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Sin carries on its war by entangling the affections and drawing them into an alliance against the mind. Grace may be enthroned in the mind, but if sin controls the affections—it has seized a fort from which it will continually assault the soul. Hence, mortification must chiefly be directed to the affections.

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He who is more frequent in his pulpit to his people, than he is in his closet for his people—is but a sorry watchman of souls.

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When someone sets his affections upon the cross and the love of Christ—he crucifies the world as a dead and undesirable thing. The baits of sin then lose their attraction. Fill your affections with the cross of Christ—and you will find no room for sin.

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Let our hearts admit: "I am poor and weak.
  Satan is too subtle, too cunning, too powerful for me—he watches constantly for advantages over my soul.
  The world presses in upon me with all sorts of pressures, pleas, and pretenses.
  My own indwelling corruption is violent, tumultuous, enticing, and entangling. As it conceives sin, it wars within me and against me. Occasions and opportunities for temptation are innumerable. Therefore, on God alone will I rely for my keeping. I will continually look to Him."

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Sin always aims at the utmost. Every time it rises up to tempt or entice us—if it has its own way, it will go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every impure thought or glance—would be adultery if it could. Every thought of unbelief—would be atheism if allowed to develop. Every rise of lust, if it has its way—would reach the height of villainy. Sin is like the grave, which is never satisfied. The deceitfulness of sin is seen in that it is modest in its first proposals—but when it prevails, it hardens men's hearts, and brings them to eternal ruin.

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The purpose of our holy and righteous God was to save His chosen people—but their sin could not go unpunished. It was, therefore, necessary that the punishment for their sin be transferred from those who deserved it, but could not bear it—to One who did not deserve it, but was able to bear it.

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A minister may fill his pews, and be esteemed by the world. But what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty—that he is, and no more!

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The growth of trees and plants takes place so slowly that it is not easily seen. Daily we notice little change. But, in course of time, we see that a great change has taken place. So it is with grace. Sanctification is a progressive, lifelong work.

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So fill your affections with the cross of Christ—that there may be no room for sin!

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Selfishness is the making a man's self his own center—the beginning and end of all he does.

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Unless we are thoroughly convinced that without Christ we are under the eternal curse of God, as the worst of His enemies—we shall never flee to Him for refuge!

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As our tender and loving friend is grieved at our unkindness towards him—so is it with the tender and loving Spirit, who has chosen our hearts for a habitation to dwell in.

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It is evident that most contend against sin—merely because of how it troubles them.

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We ought as much to pray for a blessing upon our daily rod—as upon our daily bread.

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Faith, if it is a living faith—will be a working faith. We admit no faith to be justifying—which is not itself and in its own nature, a spiritually vital principle of obedience and good works.

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There is only one way to be revived and healed from our backslidings so that we may become fruitful even in old age. We must take a steady look at the glory of Christ in His special character, in His grace and work, as shown to us in the Scripture.

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Great winds and storms help fruit-bearing trees. So also do corruptions and temptations help the fruitfulness of grace and holiness. The storm loosens the earth around its roots, so the tree is able to get its roots deeper into the earth, where it receives fresh supplies of nourishment. But only much later will it be seen to bring forth better fruit. In the same way, corruptions and temptations develop the roots of humility, self-abasement and mourning—in a deeper search for that grace by which holiness grows strong. But only later, will there be visible fruits of increased holiness.

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There is not a day but sin either foils—or is foiled; either prevails—or is prevailed on. So it will be, while we live in this world.

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There are two things which are suited to humble the souls of men:
First, a due consideration of God—in His greatness, glory, holiness, power, majesty and authority.
Secondly, a due consideration of ourselves—in our base, abject, sinful and dreadful condition.

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Let no man think to kill sin with few, easy, or gentle strokes. He who has  once smitten a serpent—if he does not continue smiting it until it is slain—may repent that he ever began the quarrel. So it is with he who undertakes to deal with sin and does not pursue it constantly to its death.

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The stronghold of the contemplation of Christ's glory, affords the soul rest—for it will be made evident that our troubles grow on the root of an over-valuation of temporal things.

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Christ is our best friend—our only true friend. Oh that with all my heart, I may be weary of everything else but converse and communion with Him.

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The duties which God requires of us, are not in proportion to the strength we possess in ourselves. Rather, they are proportionate to the resources available to us in Christ. We do not have the ability in ourselves, to accomplish the least of God's tasks. When we recognize it is impossible for us to perform a single duty in our own strength—we will discover the secret of its accomplishment: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." This is the law of grace.

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Men think all things would be better done—if they might be done according their mind. "Should it be according to your mind?" Job 34:33

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The beauty of the person of Christ, as represented in the Scripture, consists in things invisible unto the eyes of flesh. They are such as no hand of man can write, or tongue explain. It is the eye of faith alone, which can see this King in His beauty. What else can contemplate on the uncreated glories of Christ's divine nature?

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When the Holy Spirit saves people, He puts into their minds, wills and hearts—a gracious, supernatural principle which fills them with a holy desire to live to God. The whole life and being of holiness lies in this.

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When sin lets us alone—we may let sin alone. But sin is never less quiet—than when it seems to be most quiet. As sin's waters are for the most part deep when they are still—so ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion.

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Spiritual wisdom consists in finding out the subtleties, policies, and depths of any indwelling sin—to trace this serpent in all its turnings and windings—to be able to say, at its most secret actings: "This is your old way and course—I am aware of your evil devices!"

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If we do not abide in prayer—we will abide in temptation. Let this be one aspect of our daily intercession: "God, preserve my soul, and keep my heart and all its ways—so that I will not be entangled in any sin." When this is true in our lives—a passing temptation will not overcome us. We will remain free—while others lie in bondage.

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He who would mortify any disquieting lust—let him take care to be equally diligent in all parts of obedience, and know that every lust, every omission of duty, is burdensome to God—though only one is burdensome to him.

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The pretended desires of many to behold the glory of Christ in Heaven, who have no view of it by faith while they are here in this world—are nothing but self-deceiving imaginations. No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight hereafter—who does not in some measure behold it here by faith.

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Because God is an infinitely glorious, good, wise, holy, powerful, righteous, self-subsisting, self-sufficient, and all-sufficient being; the fountain and author of all being and good; the first cause, the last end, and the sovereign Lord of all—therefore, he is to be worshiped. Therefore, we are to admire, adore, and love Him—to praise, to trust and to fear Him!

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No heart can conceive that treasury of mercies which lies in this one privilege—in having liberty and ability to approach unto God at all times at His throne of grace.

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The greatest sorrow and burden—you can lay on the Father. The greatest unkindness you can do to Him—is not to believe that He loves you.

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Labor to grow better under all your afflictions—lest your afflictions grow worse and God mingles them with more darkness, bitterness and terror.

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Before the work of grace, the heart is 'stony.' It can do no more than a stone can do to please God.

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Temptations and trials put nothing into a man—but only draw out what was in him before.

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We are only servants and disciples of Christ—when we do what is commanded us, and because it is commanded us.

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What then is holiness? Holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing and living out of the gospel in our souls and lives!

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In this would I live—and upon this would I dwell in my thoughts and affections: to the withering and consumption of all the painted beauties of this world, to the crucifying all things here below—until they become to me a dead and deformed thing, no way suitable for affectionate embraces.

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Rivers, the nearer they come to the ocean where they tend—the more they increase their waters, and speed their streams. In the same way, will grace flow more fully and freely in its near approaches to the ocean of glory!

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There is no true gospel fruit—without faith and repentance.

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We speak much of God, and talk of Him, His ways and His works. The truth is, we know very little of Him.

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The vigor, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life—depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh. The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin—ought to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin. Do you mortify sin—do you make it your daily work? Be killing sin—or it will be killing you.

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Hatred of sin as sin—and not only as galling or disquieting us; and a sense of the love of Christ in the cross—lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification.

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A true saving knowledge of sin, is to be had only in the Lord Christ. In Him alone, we can see the desert of our iniquities.

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We must not be concerned only with that which troubles us—but with all that troubles God.

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See that your faith brings forth obedience—and God in due time will cause it to bring forth peace.

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The indulgence of one sin—opens the door to further sins. The indulgence of one sin—diverts the soul from the use of those means by which all other sins should be resisted.

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The foundation of true holiness and true Christian worship, is the doctrine of the gospel—what we are to believe. So when Christian doctrine is neglected, forsaken, or corrupted—true holiness and worship will also be neglected, forsaken, and corrupted.

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So great an advantage is given to sin and Satan by your temper and disposition—that without extraordinary watchfulness, care, and diligence—they will prevail against your soul.

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Mortification of from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness—is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.

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Christ so loves His people—that he sings with joy over them. "He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing." Zephaniah 3:17

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Without a sincere and diligent effort in every area of obedience—there will be no successful mortification of any one besetting sin.

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It is the Spirit alone who can mortify sin—He is promised to do it, and all other means without Him, are empty and vain. How shall he, then, mortify sin—who has not the Spirit? A man may easier see without eyes, and speak without a tongue—than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit! All attempts mortify any lust without the Spirit, are vain.

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If the Word does not dwell with power in us—it will not pass with power from us.

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If your private revelations agree with Scripture—they are needless.
If they disagree with Scripture—they are false.

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To say that we are able by our own efforts to think good thoughts or give God spiritual obedience, before we are spiritually regenerate—is to overthrow the gospel and the faith of the universal church in all ages.

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There neither is, nor ever was, in the world, nor ever shall be—the least dram of holiness, but what, flowing from Jesus Christ—is communicated by the Spirit, according to the truth and promise of the gospel.

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Would a soul continually eye Christ's everlasting tenderness and compassion—then it could not bear an hour's absence from Him. Whereas now, perhaps, it cannot watch with Him one hour.

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Temptation gains power—by persistent solicitations which beget thoughts which make evil less serious.

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Could we realize what a constant enemy of the soul abides within us—then what diligence and watchfulness we would have! How woeful is the sloth and negligence of so many who live blind and asleep to this reality of indwelling sin. There is an exceeding efficacy and power in the indwelling sin of believers, for it constantly inclines itself towards evil. We need to be awake, then—for our enemy is not only UPON us, as it was with Samson—but it is also IN us!

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Only what God has commanded in His Word—should be regarded as binding. In all else, we have liberty.

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For a man solemnly to undertake the interpretation of any portion of Scripture without invocation of God, to be taught and instructed by His Spirit—is a high provocation of Him. Nor shall I expect the discovery of truth from anyone who thus proudly engages in a work so much beyond his ability.

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Ignorance of God and of ourselves—is the great principle and cause of all our worries. This arises mostly not from lack of light and instruction—but for lack of consideration and application.

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We all profess that we are bound for Heaven, immortality, and glory—but is it any evidence that we really design it, if all our thoughts are consumed about the trifles of this world, which we must leave behind us, and have only occasional thoughts of things above?

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A man may take the measure of his growth and decay in grace—according to his thoughts and meditations upon the person of Christ, and the glory of Christ's Kingdom, and of His love.

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Were our affections filled and taken up with spiritual realities—what access could sin, with its painted pleasures, with its sugared poisons, with its envenomed baits, have unto our souls?

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There is no broader way to apostasy than to reject God's sovereignty in all things concerning the revelation of Himself and our obedience.

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To suppose that what God requires of us only what we have power of ourselves to do, is to make the cross and grace of Jesus Christ of none effect.

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Temptation is like a knife which may either cut the food, or the throat of a man; it may be his food or his poison, his exercise or his destruction.

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Holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing and living out the gospel in our souls and lives.

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All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless—it must be done by the Spirit.

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A man may easier see without eyes, speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin—without the Spirit.

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The custom of sinning takes away the sense of sin;
the course of the world takes away the shame of sin.

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The vigor and power and comfort of our spiritual life depends on our mortification of deeds of the flesh.

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For sinners to have fellowship with the infinitely holy God, is truly astonishing!

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Morality divorced from the doctrines of the gospel, is not that holiness which the gospel requires.

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The goal of the Christian life is not external conformity or mindless action, but a passionate love for God informed by the mind and embraced by the will.

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Our great Pattern has showed us what our deportment ought to be in all suggestions and temptations. When the devil showed Him "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," to tempt Him withal, He did not stand and look upon them, viewing their glory, and pondering their empire—but instantly, without stay, He cries, "Get you hence, Satan." Meet your temptation in its entrance with thoughts of faith concerning Christ on the cross; this will make it sink before you. Entertain no parley, no dispute with it, if you would not enter into it.

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Truth is the only guide to right thinking. If the mind is not guided by truth, its thoughts will soon wander into error. Without the Word of God, the mind of man wanders about in endless conjectures.

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The great secret purpose of sinful man is to go on living his sinful life with as little trouble as possible in the present life, and with every hope of avoiding future punishments in the next.

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Many cannot meditate because their minds are so cluttered up with earthly things. The mind must be spiritual and holy, freed from all earthly clutter.

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Gospel obedience is the performance of all moral duties in the power and grace of Christ to the glory of God.

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Evangelical doctrine must be understood by the mind, loved by the heart, and willingly and gladly submitted to by the will.

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The only way to prevent this falling away from the gospel, is to love the truth and to experience its power in the heart. The danger of apostasy will always be present if men receive the truth only in their minds, but do not love it in their hearts and gladly submit to it in their wills.

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All who profess to be Christians but are not living holy lives, are really renouncing obedience to Christ's commands and despising his promises, preferring instead the pleasures of sin. Such people declare they have found nothing lovely in Christ's commands, nor any happiness in keeping them, nor any assurance in Christ's promises, nor any value in the things promised compared with the world and the pleasures of sin.

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All morality arising from the old nature is never acceptable to God.

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The holy obedience which the gospel requires arises from gratitude for salvation received, and not that servile obedience which arises from the search for merit.

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The reason the Jews rejected Christ when he came was because they could see neither form nor beauty in him why should he be desired. So none will remain constantly faithful to Christ who is not able to spiritually discern the glory of his person and his offices.

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Lack of a due sense of the sinfulness of our best works, leads to dreams of self-righteousness and self-justification.

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Unbelievers see no glory in Christ. They see nothing attractive about him. They despise him in their hearts. Outwardly they cry, like Judas, 'Hail Master!" but in their hearts they crucify him.

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Unless we deny ourselves and all our own ideas and opinions, unless we become humble and teachable—we can never receive the gospel.

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The Lord Christ has made evangelical obedience the outward evidence of being a true member of his church.

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Do not plunge straight into prayer or worship, but spend time meditating on the glory of Christ first and in this way the graces necessary for carrying out that duty will be roused and ready.

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There is no grace that fills the hearts of believers with more gratitude and joy than being delivered from backsliding.

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One of the greatest privileges the believer has, both in this world and for eternity, is to behold the glory of Christ. So Christ prays that ‘they may behold my glory'.

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Only a sight of His glory, and nothing else, will truly satisfy God's people!

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The soul which can be satisfied without beholding the glory of Christ, that cannot be eternally satisfied with beholding the glory of Christ, is not a soul for whom Christ prays.

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Cursed is the person who encourages you to come to Christ and allows you to think that you can still indulge one sin in your life.

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The atheist cannot run away from the truth of God because he cannot run away from himself, nor can he run away from the evidences of God's eternal power and godhead in all creation.

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Without the diligent use of the grace of obedience, we shall never enjoy the graces of joy, peace and assurance.