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THE PRIVY KEY OF HEAVEN

(A Discourse of Closet Prayer)

by Thomas Brooks, published during
the awful plague of London in 1665.

"But when you pray, go into your room, close
the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
Then your Father, who sees what is done in
secret, will reward you." Mat_6 6

CHOICE QUOTES

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Choice excerpts from Thomas Brooks'
THE PRIVY KEY OF HEAVEN

(A Discourse of Closet Prayer, published during the awful plague of London in 1665)

The devil's tennis-ball

"Warn those who are **idle**." 1 Thessalonians 5 14

Take heed of an idle and slothful spirit. An idle life and a holy heart are far asunder. By doing nothing men learn to do evil things. It is easy slipping out of an idle life into an evil and wicked life; yes, an idle life is of itself evil, for man was made to be a active, not to be idle. Idleness is a mother-sin, a breeding-sin; it is **the devil's cushion**—on which he sits; and **the devil's anvil—**on which he frames very great and very many sins. Look! as toads and serpents breed most in standing waters, so sin thrives most in idle people. Idleness is that which provokes the Lord to forsake men's bodies, and the devil to possess their souls.

No man has less means to preserve his body, and more temptations to infect his soul, than an idle person. Oh shake off sloth! The sluggish Christian will be sleeping, or idling, or trifling; when he should be in his closet a-praying. Sloth is a fatal sickness of the soul; get it cured—or it will be your eternal bane. Of all devils, it is **the 'idle' devil** which keeps men most out of their closets. There is nothing that gives the devil so much advantage against us as idleness.

Idleness is the time of temptation. An idle person is **the devil's tennis-ball**, tossed by him at his pleasure.

The fowler bends his bow and spreads his net for birds when they are roosting, not when they are in flight. So Satan shoots his most fiery darts at men, when they are most idle and slothful.

Slothful and idle people commonly lie so long a-bed, and spend so much precious time between the comb and the mirror, and in eating, drinking, sporting, and trifling; that they can find no time for private prayer. Certainly those who would rather go *sleeping to hell*, *than sweating to heaven*, will never care much for prayer. And therefore shun sloth and idleness, as you would shun a lion in your way, or poison in your food, or coals in your bosom!

Dirt, handsomely fashioned

"All your life you will sweat to produce food, until your dying day. Then you will return to the **ground** from which you came. For you were made from **dust**, and to the **dust** you will return." Genesis 3 19.

Our bodies are but **dirt, handsomely fashioned**. We derive our pedigree from the dirt, and are akin to clay.
One calls the body "the soul's beast."
Another calls it "worms' food".
Paul calls it "a body of vileness".

Secret meals make fat bodies

Secret duties are the most soul-enriching duties. Look! as **secret meals make fat bodies**—so secret duties make fat souls. And as secret trades brings in great earthly riches, so secret prayers makes many rich in spiritual blessings and in heavenly riches. Private prayer is that secret key of heaven which unlocks all the treasures of glory to the soul. The best riches and the sweetest mercies, God usually gives to His people—when they are in their closets upon their knees.

All the **graces** of the saints are enlivened, and nourished, and strengthened by the sweet secret influences which their souls fall under, when they are in their closet-communion with God. Certainly there are none so rich in gracious experiences, as those who are most exercised in closet duties.

As the tender dew which falls in the silent night makes the grass and herbs and flowers to flourish and grow more abundantly than great showers of rain which fall in the day; so secret prayer will more abundantly cause the sweet herbs of grace and holiness to grow and flourish in the soul, than all those more open, public, and visible duties of religion, which too, too often, are mingled and mixed with the sun and wind of pride and hypocrisy.

The secret kisses

When a Christian is in a wilderness, which is a very solitary place, then God delights to speak friendly and comfortably to him Hosea 2 14, "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak friendly or comfortably to her," or as the Hebrew has it, "I will speak to her heart."

"When I have her alone," says God, "in a solitary wilderness, I will speak such things to her heart, as shall exceedingly cheer her, and comfort her, and even make her heart leap and dance within her." Certainly the soul usually enjoys most communion with God in secret.

A husband imparts his mind most freely and fully to his wife when she is alone; and so does Christ to the believing soul. Oh . . .
  the secret kisses,
  the secret embraces,
  the secret visits,
  the secret whispers,
  the secret cheerings,
  the secret sealings,
  the secret discoveries,
which God gives to His people when in secret prayer.

That white devil!

While the disciples were healing diseases and casting out demons, the *proud white devil* was a-stirring in their own souls; as is evident by that gentle rebuke which our Savior gives them in Luke 10 20, "Don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you."

There is no pious duty which a Christian performs, but one white devil or another—one lust or another—will be still dogging and following of him to that duty. There is no public duty, there is no family duty, there is no private duty which a Christian performs—but either **that white devil pride**, or that white devil **hypocrisy**, or that white devil **vainglory;** or else some one or another white devil will follow the soul, near at heel to it.

Two infamous strumpets

"You have set our iniquities before You, our **secret sins** in the light of Your presence." Psalms 90 8

"Can anyone hide in **secret places** so that I cannot see him? Do not I fill heaven and earth?" Jer. 23 24

"The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good." Proverbs 15 3

As we are never out of the reach of God's **hand**,
so we are never from under the view of God's **eye**.

God is privy to **our most secret sins**. His eye is as much upon secret sins, as it is upon open sins. God has an eye upon our inmost evils. He sees all that is done in the dark.

There is no cloud, nor curtain, nor moment of darkness, which can stand between the eyes of God and the ways of men. "For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and He examines all his paths." Prov. 5 21. In this scripture Solomon mainly speaks of the ways of the adulterer, which usually are plotted with the most cunning secrecy; yet God sees all those ways. Look! as no boldness can exempt the adulterer from the justice of God, so no secrecy can hide him from the eye of God. Though men labor to hide their ways from others, and from themselves—yet it is but labor in vain to endeavor to hide them from God. Men who labor to hide God from themselves, can never hide themselves from God. Paphnutius turned Thais and Ephron, **two infamous strumpets**, from their harlotry, with only this argument—"That God sees all things in the dark, when the doors are closed, the windows shut, and the curtains drawn."

Those sins which lie closest and are most secretly lurking in the heart, are as obvious and odious to God as those who are most fairly written upon a man's forehead. God is **all eye**; so that He sees all—even the most secret turnings and windings of our hearts.

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight but all things are naked and opened (that is, **anatomized**) to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Hebrews 4 13

What is the curtain, or the darkest night, or the double lock, or the secret chamber—to Him who clearly observes all things in a perfect nakedness. God has an eye upon the most inward intentions of the heart, and the most subtle motions of the soul. Certainly there is not a creature, not a thought, not a thing, but lies open to the all-seeing eye of God. The Lord knows **all our secret sinnings** as exactly as our visible sinnings.

"If you cannot hide yourself from the sun, which is God's minister of light; how impossible will it be to hide yourself from Him, whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun!" (Ambrose)

"My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from Me, nor is their sin concealed from My eyes." Jeremiah 16 17

This is the killing aggravation of all sin—that it is done before the face of God; that it is committed in the royal presence of the King of kings! The very consideration of God's omnipresence should bravely arm us against sin! Shall not the strict, the pure, the jealous eye of an all-seeing God—keep you from sinning in the secret chamber, when all curtains are drawn, doors bolted, and everyone in the house sleeping—but you and your Delilah?

Oh! what dreadful atheism is bound up in that man's heart, who is more afraid of the eye of his father, his pastor, his child—than he is of the eye and presence of the eternal God! Those who wallow in secret sins, act as if there were . . .
  no **God** to behold them,
  nor **conscience** to accuse them,
  nor **judgment-day** to arraign them,
  nor **justice** to condemn them,
  nor **hell** to torment them!

Though they may escape the eyes of men—yet they shall never escape the judgment of God!

The cockatrice must be crushed

"Lust having conceived, brings forth sin." James 1 15

First, sin has its **conception**—which is its delight;
and then sin has its **birth**—which is its action;
and then sin has its **growth**—which is its custom;
and then sin has its **end**—which is its damnation!

The very **thought** of sin, if but **meditated** on, will break forth into **action**; action into **custom;** custom into **habit;** and then both body and soul are irrecoverably lost to all eternity!

If the subtle Serpent can but wriggle in his tail by a sinful **thought**, he will soon get in his head by a worse **action**!

The cockatrice must be crushed in the egg, else it will soon become a serpent!

It would make him pull his hat over his eyes!

All Christians have their **secret sins**. Secret not only from other men—but from himself! It is but natural for every man to err, and then to be ignorant of his errors. Every man's sins are beyond his understanding. There is not the best, the wisest, nor the holiest man in the world—who can give a full and entire list of his sins.

"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults." Psalm 19 12

"Who can understand his errors?" This interrogation has the force of an affirmation "Who can?" No man! No, not the most perfect and innocent man in the world!

O friends! who can reckon up . . .
the secret sinful imaginations,
the secret sinful inclinations,
the secret pride,
the secret blasphemies,
the secret hypocrisies,
the secret atheistical risings,
the secret murmurings,
the secret repinings,
the secret discontents,
the secret insolencies,
the secret filthinesses,
the secret unbelievings,
which God might every day charge upon his soul?

Should the best and holiest man on earth have but his secret sins written on his forehead, it would not only put him to a crimson blush—but **it would make him pull his hat over his eyes**, or cover his face with a double scarf!

"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults." Psalm 19 12

The constant cry of the rod

One lesson that you are to learn by the rod of affliction, is to get more weaned and more mortified affections to all worldly comforts, contentments, and enjoyments.

A man never comes to experience so much of . . .
the emptiness,
the nothingness,
the uselessness,
the vanity,
the mutability,
the impotency,
the insufficiency,
the uncertainty
of all worldly comforts and enjoyments—as when he falls under the rod of affliction. **The constant cry of the rod** is, "Be dead to the profits, pleasures, honors, and applauses of the world! Be dead to everything below a living Jesus!"

He was still a-pointing at the toads in their bosoms

How shall we find out that particular sin, for which God corrects us—for which He has brought the rod upon us?

Seriously observe what that sin is, which your soul would have spared above all, which your soul is most unwilling to leave, and bid an everlasting farewell to. Observe what your right-hand sin, your bosom sin, your constitutional sin, your complexion sin, is; for it is a hundred to one that God has sent the rod for the subduing of that very sin! Commonly by the rod, God points at the mortifying of that particular sin to which the heart stands most strongly inclined.

It may be that sin which you cannot endure should be touched, or reproved, or spoken against. Ah! how proud, how impatient, how passionate, how mad are many—when you come to touch **their right-eye sin!** When you come to touch them in the tender part, oh! **then they fume, and swell, and rage**, and carry on like people out of their wits; as you may see in the scribes and pharisees, who were so angry and mad with Christ that they sought His death; and all because **He was still a-pointing at the toads in their bosoms**; namely, pride, vainglory, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. Oh! they could not endure that the sharp razor of reproof should come near their sorest part!

Certainly that Christian must be under a very bad distemper, who smites a righteous man with reproach—for smiting him with a reproof. Though **gracious reproofs are a choice remedy**, yet few stomachs can bear them. Who is angry with the physician for prescribing a bitter medicine? And yet, ah! how angry are many Christians when they fall under holy reproofs. Now, doubtless, the voice of the rod is this, "Soul! take heed of **that sin which you cannot endure should be touched**. Labor mightily with God to get that particular sin mortified—which you cannot endure should be reproved." It is very probable that, for the subduing of that particular sin, the Lord has visited you with His fatherly rod.

A whore's forehead

"You have **a whore's forehead**, you refuse to be ashamed!" Jeremiah 3 3

"Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all! They do not even know how to blush!" Jeremiah 6 15

They had sinned away shame, instead of being ashamed of sin. *Continuance in sin* had quite banished all sense of sin and all shame for sin; so that they would not allow nature to draw her *veil of blushing* before their great abominations. How applicable these scriptures are to the present time, I will leave the prudent reader to judge.

But what does the prophet do, now that they were as bold in sin, and as shameless as so many harlots; now that they were grown up to that height of sin and wickedness; now that they were above all shame and blushing; now that they were grown so proud, so hardened, so obstinate, so rebellious, so bent on self-destruction—that no *mercies* could melt them or allure them, nor any threatenings or *judgments* could in any way terrify them or stop them? The prophet goes into a corner, he retires into the most secret places, and there he weeps bitterly; there he weeps as if he were resolved to drown himself in his own tears. "I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears." Jeremiah 13 17

In the times wherein we live, hell seems to be broken loose, and men turned into incarnate devils! Soul-damning wickednesses walk up and down the streets with **a whore's forehead**, without the least check or restraint.

Ah, England, England! what pride, luxury, lasciviousness, licentiousness, wantonness, drunkenness, cruelties, injustice, oppressions, fornications, adulteries, falsehoods, hypocrisies, atheisms, horrid blasphemies, and hellish impieties—are now to be found rampant in the midst of you! Ah, England! England! how are the Scriptures rejected, God derided, and wickedness tolerated!

And what is the voice of all these crying abominations—but *every Christian to his closet*—every Christian to his closet—and there weep, with weeping Jeremiah, bitterly—for all these great abominations whereby God is dishonored openly. Oh weep in secret for their sins—who openly glory in their sins, which should be their greatest shame. Oh blush in secret for those who are past all blushing for their sins; for who knows, but that the whole land may fare the better for the sakes of a few, who are mourners in secret?

Contentedly ignorant

"For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55 9

Take heed of **curiosity**, and of spending too much of your precious time in searching into those dark, concealed, mysterious, and hidden truths and things of God and religion, which lie most remote from the understanding of the best and wisest of men.

Those who are troubled with the itch of curiosity, will say they can never be satisfied until they come to the bottom of the most deep and profound things of God. **They love to pry into God's secrets**, and to scan the mysteries of religion—by their weak, shallow reason. Curious searchers into the deep mysterious things of God will make all God's depths to be shallows, rather than they will be thought not able to fathom them by the short line of their own reason.

Oh that men would once learn to be **contentedly ignorant**, where God would not have them knowing! Oh that men were once so humble, as to account it no disparagement to them, to acknowledge some depths in God, and in the blessed Scripture, which their shallow reason cannot fathom!

They are only a company of fools, who attempt to know more than God would have them. Did not Adam's tree of knowledge make him and his posterity mere fools? He who goes to school to his own reason, has a fool for his schoolmaster!

Oh that we were wise to admire those deep mysteries which we cannot understand, and to adore those depths and counsels which we cannot reach! "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!" Romans 11 33

Oh let us restrain our curiosity in the things of God, and sit down satisfied and contented to resolve many of God's actions into some hidden causes which lie secret in the abyss of His eternal knowledge and infallible will.

Curiosity is one of Satan's most dangerous weapons, by which he keeps many souls out of their closets, yes, out of heaven! When many a poor soul begins in good earnest to look towards heaven, and to apply himself to closet duties, then Satan begins to bestir himself, and to labor with all his might, so to busy the poor soul with vain inquiries, and curious speculations, and unprofitable curiosities. Ah! how well might it have been with many a man, had he but spent one quarter of that time in closet prayer, that he has spent in curious inquiries after things that have not been fundamental to his happiness.

Many are more busy about reconciling difficult scriptures, than about mortifying of unruly lusts! They set more value upon vain speculations, than upon things that make most for edification. Such men of abstracted conceits, are but a company of wise fools! Had many men spent but half that time in secret prayer, that they have spent in seeking after the philosopher's stone, how happy might they have been! Oh how holy, how happy, how heavenly, how humble, how wise, how knowing, might many men have been—had they spent but half that time in closet prayer, which they have spent in searching after those things that are hard to be understood!

"There are **secret things** which belong to the Lord our God." Deuteronomy 29 29

God's spy in the heart

Conscience is **God's spy in the heart**.

'Conscience,' says Philo, 'is the little tribunal of the soul. Conscience is a thousand witnesses, for or against a man. Conscience is a court of record, and whatever it sees it writes down; and conscience is always as quick in writing as the sinner can be in sinning.' The very heathen could say that conscience was a god to every man.

Conscience, as a scribe, a register—sits in the closet of your hearts, with pen in hand, and makes a journal of all your secret ways and secret crimes, which are above the cognizance of others. Conscience sets down the *time* when, the *place* where, the *manner* how, and the *people* with whom—such and such secret wickednesses have been committed; and that so clear and evident, that, go where you will, and do what you can, the characters of them shall never be cancelled or erased out, until God appears in judgment. Let a man sin in the most hidden seclusion which human policy can contrive, let him take all the ways he can to hide his sins, to cloak and cover his sin, as Adam did—yet conscience will so play the judge, that it will bring in the evidence, produce the law, urge the penalty, and pass the sentence of condemnation upon him.

This perfect pattern

"He who says he abides in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked." 1 John 2 6

Oh that this blessed Scripture might always lie warm upon our hearts. **A Christian's whole life** should be nothing but a visible representation of Christ. It is not only our liberty—but our duty and glory, to follow Christ inviolably in all His moral virtues. Other patterns are imperfect and defective—but Christ is a perfect pattern! Of all His children, they are the happiest, who come nearest to **this perfect pattern**.

"Leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps." 1 Peter 2 21

God would not rub so hard

"I will turn My hand against you and will burn away your dross completely; I will remove all your impurities."
Isaiah 1 25

Afflictions cleanse and purge away the dross, the filth, and the scum of the Christian.

All the harm the fire did to the three children, or rather the three champions—was to burn off their cords. Our lusts are cords of vanity, but the fire of affliction shall burn them up. Sharp afflictions are a fire—to purge out our dross, and to make our graces shine; they are a potion—to carry away ill humours; they are cold frosts —to destroy the vermin; they are a tempestuous sea—to purge the wine from its dregs; they are a sharp corrosive—to eat out the dead flesh.

Afflictions are compared to washing—which takes away the filth of the soul, as water does the filth of the body. **God would not rub so hard**, were it not to fetch out the dirt and spots that are in His people's hearts.

The shop, the farm, and the oxen

Take heed of engaging yourselves in a crowd of worldly businesses. Many have so much to do on earth that they have no time to look up to heaven. As much earth puts out the fire, so much worldly business puts out the fire of heavenly affections. Look! as the earth swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Numbers 22 32; so much worldly business swallows up so much precious time, that many men have no leisure to be with God in their closets. There is nothing that has kept men more from Christ—than **the shop, the farm, and the oxen**, etc., Luke 14 16-22.

The outward dress and garb of religion

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness." Matthew 23 23

Take heed of spending too much of your precious time about circumstantials, about the minor things of religion, as "mint, dill, and cummin," or in searching into the circumstances of worship, or in standing stoutly for this or that ceremony, or about inquiring what fruit it was which Adam ate in paradise, or in inquiring after things which God in His infinite wisdom has concealed.

It is one of Satan's great designs to hinder men in the great and weighty duties of religion, by busying them most about the lowest and least matters of religion. Satan is never better pleased, than when he sees Christians puzzled and perplexed about those things in religion, which are of no great consequence or importance. Such as are more busied about ceremonies than substances, about the form of godliness than the power. Such are more taken up with **the outward dress and garb of religion**, than they are with the spirit, power, and life of religion.

There cannot be a surer nor a greater character of a hypocrite, than to make a great deal of stir about little things in religion, and in the meantime neglect the great and main things in religion.

They pierce not, they cut not, they fly not

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." James 5 16

Cold prayers call for a denial.

Be fervent, be warm, be importunate with God in all your closet duties and performances. Certainly, all those usual phrases of *crying, wrestling,* and *striving* with God, which are scattered up and down in Scripture, strongly show that holy importunity and sacred violence which the saints of old have expressed in their addresses to God.

Fervency feathers the wings of prayer, and makes them fly the swifter to heaven. An arrow, if it be drawn up but a little way, flies not far; but if it be drawn up to the head, it will fly far, and pierce deeply. Just so, fervent prayer flies as high as heaven, and will certainly bring down blessings from thence.

Look! as in a painted fire there is no heat; so in a cold prayer there is no heat, no warmth, no omnipotency, no devotion, no blessing. Cold prayers are like arrows without points, as swords without edges, as birds without wings **they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not** up to heaven. Such prayers as have no heavenly fire in them, do always freeze before they reach as high as heaven. But fervent prayer is very prevalent with God.

The very soul of prayer

"My son, give Me your heart." Proverbs 23 26

In all your closet-duties God looks first and most to your hearts. It is not a piece, it is not a corner of the heart, which will satisfy the Maker of the heart. **The very soul of prayer** lies in the pouring out of the soul before God. The heart is a treasure, a bed of spices, a royal throne wherein He delights. God looks not at
the elegance of your prayers, to see how refined they are; nor at
the geometry of your prayers, to see how long they are; nor at
the arithmetic of your prayers, to see how many they are; nor at
the music of your prayers; nor at
the sweetness of your voice; nor at
the logic of your prayers;
but at the sincerity of your prayers, how hearty they are.

The reason why so many are so unsuccessful in their closet-duties and services, is because there is no more of their hearts in them. No man can make sure work or happy work in prayer but he who makes heart work on it. When a man's heart is in his prayers, then great and sweet will be his returns from heaven.

There is no prayer acknowledged, approved, accepted, recorded, or rewarded by God—but that wherein the heart is sincere.

Prayer without the heart is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Prayer is only lovely and weighty, as the heart is in it, and no otherwise. It is . . .
not the lifting up of the voice,
nor the wringing of the hands,
nor the beating of the breasts,
nor an affected tone,
nor studied motions,
nor seraphical expressions;
but the stirrings of the heart, which God looks at in prayer. God hears no more than the heart speaks. If the heart be dumb, God will certainly be deaf. No prayer is accepted by God—but that which is the travail of the heart.

A dumb devil

Among all God's children, there is not one possessed with **a dumb devil**. **Prayerless people** are . . .
forsaken of God,
blinded by Satan,
hardened in sin,
and every breath they draw, are liable to all temporal, spiritual, and eternal judgments.

Prayer is that part of natural worship due to God, which none will deny but stark atheists.

I have read of a man who, being sick, and afraid of death, fell to praying. And to move God to hear him, told him "that he had never troubled Him with his prayers before; and if He would but hear him at that time, he would never trouble Him again." This world is full of such profane, blasphemous, atheistical wretches.

Certainly prayerless people are graceless people.

God's eye

"Lord! all my desire is before You; and my groaning is not hidden from You." Psalm 38 9

We cannot get into any blind hole, or dark corner, or secret place—but the Lord has an eye there, the Lord will keep us company there. There is not the darkest, dirtiest hole in the world into which a saint creeps—but God has a favorable eye there. God never lacks . . .
an **eye** to see our secret tears,
nor an **ear** to hear our secret cries and groans,
nor a **heart** to grant our secret requests.

We cannot sigh out a prayer in secret—but He sees us; we cannot lift up our eyes to Him at midnight—but He observes us. The eye which God has upon His people when they are in secret, is such a special tender eye of love—as opens His ear, His heart, and His hand, for their good. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer." 1 Peter 3 12

God's eye is upon . . .
every secret sigh, and
every secret groan, and
every secret tear, and
every secret desire, and
every secret pant of love,
and every secret breathing of soul,
and every secret melting and working of heart.

As a Christian is never out of the reach of God's hand, so he is never out of the view of **God's eye**.

Tears have tongues

"The Lord has heard **the voice of my weeping**."
Psalm 6 8

Tears are not mutes. Tears have a voice. **Tears have tongues.** Tears can speak. There is no prayer compared to those which secret tears make in the ears of God. Tears make the most forcible entry into the ears of the great God of heaven.

Penitent tears are undeniable ambassadors which never return from the throne of grace without a gracious answer. Tears are a kind of silent prayers, which, though they say nothing—yet they obtain pardon; and though they plead not a man's cause —yet they obtain mercy at the hands of God.

Uncovered and laid bare

Ah! how many Christians are there who would blush and be ashamed to walk in the streets, should but their infirmities, enormities, and wickednesses be written on their foreheads, or known to others!

There are many sins which they have fallen into since conversion, which, should they be known to the world, would make themselves to stench in the nostrils of all who know them.

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is **uncovered and laid bare** before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Hebrews 4 13

An atheist at home

He who puts on a religious demeanor abroad to gain himself a great name among men, and at the same time lives like **an atheist at home**, shall at the last be unmasked by God, and presented before all the world for a most detestable hypocrite.

No cause to murmur or complain

One lesson that you are to learn under the afflictive rod of God, is to humbly to kiss the rod, and patiently and quietly to lie under the rod, until the Lord shall either give you a gracious, or a glorious, deliverance from it.

What is the rod—compared to the horrors of conscience, and to the flames of hell, or to an everlasting separation from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power? Therefore put your mouths in the dust, and be silent before the Lord!

He who has deserved a hanging—if he escapes with a whipping, has **no cause to murmur or complain**.

We who have deserved a damning—have little cause to murmur or complain of a whipping, yes, though it should be with a pestilential rod.

Then you will kiss it!

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline." Revelation 3 19

Christian! Always look on the *rod* of affliction, in conjunction with the *hand* which holds it. Thus Jesus did, "Shall I not drink the cup that **My Father** has given Me to drink?" Though the cup was a bitter cup, a bloody cup—yet seeing it was put into His hand by His Father, He drinks it off, with a "Father, I thank You."

The rod in itself brings nothing but pain to the child; but the rod in the hand of a father brings nothing but love, kindness, and sweetness. You should never look upon the rod of affliction, but as it is in the hand of your heavenly Father—and **then you will kiss it**, rather than murmur under it!

He draws out the core

Afflictions are the Lord's drawing-plasters, by which **He draws out the core** of pride, earthliness, self-love, covetousness, etc. Pride was one of man's first sins, and is still the root and source of all other sins. Now, to prevent it, God many times chastens man with pain, yes, with strong pain, upon his bed Job 34 31-32, "I have endured my punishment; I will no longer act wickedly. Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I won't do it again." The burnt child dreads the fire. Sin is but a bitter sweet; it is an evil worse than hell itself. Look, as salt brine preserves things from putrefying; so sanctified rods, sanctified afflictions, preserves and keeps the people of God from sinning.

His school of instruction

"The rod is for the back of the one who lacks sense."
Proverbs 10 13

The rod is to make the child sensible of his folly and vanity. So it is here God takes up the rod, but it is to make His people sensible of their folly and vanity; it is to make them look up to Him, and to look into conscience, and to look out to their lives. God's house of correction is **His school of instruction**
His lashes are our lessons,
His scourges are our schoolmasters,
His chastisements are our corrections.

Hence both the Hebrews and Greeks express *chastening* and *teaching* by one and the same word, because *teaching* is the true end of *chastening.*

Afflictions are a Christian's looking-glass, by which he may see how to dress his own soul, and to mend whatever is amiss.

All the afflictions, troubles, and trials

"Heed the rod and the One who appointed it." Micah 6 9

It is God who appoints the rod, and ordains it to do what service He pleases. It is God who has an active hand, in all the afflictions which come upon His people.

"Heed the rod," that is, "believe the report the rod makes."

The rod reports, that of all evils **sin** is the greatest evil; and that of all bitters, sin is the greatest bitter. Oh believe the report of the rod! The rod reports, that **God** is angry, that God is displeased. Oh believe its report! The rod reports the **creature** to be mere vanity and vexation of spirit. Oh believe its report! The rod reports our nearest and dearest comforts, contentments, and enjoyments to be mixed, mutable, and momentary. Oh believe its report!
The rod reports . . .
sin to be vile, and
the world to be vain, and
heaven to be glorious, and
Christ to be most precious!
Oh believe its report!

All the afflictions, troubles, and trials which God lays upon His people, are His rod. It is their highest and greatest concernment to hear the voice of the rod, and to learn those lessons which God would have them learn by the rod.

He must deny himself

"If anyone wants to be My follower, **he must deny himself**, take up his cross, and follow Me." Mark 8 34

He must deny **sinful** self, which takes in a man's lusts.

He must deny **natural** self, which takes in a man's arts, parts, gifts, and reason.

He must deny **religious** self, which takes in all a man's religious duties and services.

He must deny **moral** self, which includes a freedom from gross, heinous, enormous wickednesses; and a fair, sweet, harmless behavior towards men.

He must deny **relative** self, which takes in our nearest and dearest relations in the flesh; as wife, children, father, mother, brothers, sisters, etc.

One sigh and groan

Some may think that they lack the ability to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret. I answer, You cannot pray; but can you not sigh? can you not groan? There may be the Spirit of adoption in sighs and groans, as well as in vocal prayer. The force, the virtue, the efficacy, the excellency of prayer does not consist in the number and flourish of words;but in the supernatural motions of the Spirit—in sighs, and groans, and pangs, and strong affections of heart, which are unspeakable and unutterable. Certainly, **the very soul of prayer** lies in the pouring out of a man's soul before the Lord, though it be but in sighs, groans, and tears. **One sigh and groan** from a broken heart, is more pleasing to God, than all human eloquence.

Remember, that God is no critical observer of the poor expressions which fall from His poor children, when they are in prayer. He is such a Father as is very well pleased with the broken expressions and flawed stammerings of His people when they pray. It is not a flood of words, nor studied notions, nor seraphical expressions, nor elegant phrases in prayer—which takes the ear, or which delights the heart of God, or which opens the gates of glory, or which brings down the best of blessings upon the soul; but uprightness, holiness, heavenliness, spiritualness, and brokenness of heart. These are the things which make a conquest upon God, and bring most benefit to the soul.

My times

"**My times** are in Your hands," says David, Psalm 31 15.

Not only the times of his sorrows—but also the times of his comforts; not only the times of his miseries—but also the times of his mercies; not only the times of his dangers—but also the times of his duties, were in the hands of God. It is observable the Psalmist does not say time—but time**s**, in the plural, to show that every point and period of time depends upon the hand of God.

A work of absolute necessity

Private prayer is **a work of absolute necessity**,
for the bringing of the heart into a holy frame,
for the keeping of the heart in a holy frame,
for the discovery of sin,
for the preventing of sin,
for the embittering of sin,
for the weakening of sin,
for the purging away of sin,
for a full exercise of grace,
for an eminent increase of grace
to arm us against temptations, afflictions, and sufferings,
to fit us for all other duties and services.

Pray without ceasing

"Persistent in prayer." Romans 12 12

The Greek is a metaphor taken from hunting dogs, which never give up the chase until they have got their prey. A Christian must not only pray—but hold on in prayer, until he has got the heavenly prize.

"**Pray without ceasing**." 1 Thessalonians 5 17

We are always **needing**; and therefore we had need be praying always.

The **world** is always alluring; and therefore we had need be always a-praying.

Satan is always a-tempting; and therefore we had need be always a-praying.

We are always a-**sinning**; and therefore we had need be always a-praying.

We are in **dangers** always; and therefore we had need be praying always.

We are **dying** always; and therefore we had need be praying always. Man's whole life is but a lingering death; man no sooner begins to live—but he begins to die. Dying Christians had need be praying Christians, and those who are always a-dying had need be always a-praying.

My Friend

Christ is a universal Friend.

He is an omnipotent Friend, an almighty Friend.

He is an omniscient Friend.

He is an omnipresent Friend.

He is an unfailing Friend.

He is an independent Friend.

He is an unchangeable Friend.

He is a watchful Friend.

He is a tender and compassionate Friend.

He is a close and faithful Friend.

"His mouth is most sweet yes, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is **my Friend**." Song 5 16

He overcomes the Almighty!

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Genesis 32 28

Oh the power of private prayer! It has a kind of omnipotence in it; it takes God captive; it holds Him as a prisoner; it binds the hands of the Almighty! Yes, it will wrench a mercy, a blessing, out of the hand of heaven itself! Oh the power of that prayer which makes a man victorious over the greatest, the highest power! Jacob, though a man, a single man, a traveling man, a tired man, yes, though a worm, which is easily crushed and trodden under foot—yet in private prayer he is so potent, that he overcomes the omnipotent God! He is so mighty, that **he overcomes the Almighty!**

He bruises His spices

"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness." Hebrews 12 10

Grace always thrives most when saints are under the rod.

When Christians are under the rod, then their graces do not only bud, but blossom and bring forth fruit, as Aaron's rod did. The snuffing of the candle makes it burn the brighter. God beats and bruises His children, to make them burn the brighter; **He bruises His spices**, to make them send forth the greater aromatic fragrance.

The Jews were always best when they were in an afflicted condition.

Stars shine brightest in the darkest nights.

Vines grow the better for bleeding.

Gold shines the better for scouring.

Juniper smells sweetest when in the fire.

By afflictions, God many times revives, quickens, and recovers the decayed graces of His people. By afflictions, God many times inflames that **love** which is cold; and He strengthens that **faith** which is failing; and he puts life into those **hopes** which are languishing; and new spirits into those **joys** and comforts which are withering and dying. Sharp afflictions recover and revive our decayed graces.

The smarting rod abases the loveliness of the world, which entices us; it abates the lustiness of the flesh within, which incites us to vanity and folly.

She hugs her young ones to death

"Withhold not correction from the child, for if you beat him with the rod, he shall not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell."
Proverbs 23 13-14

God uses the rod to prevent further folly, mischief, and misery. It is said of the ape, that **she hugs her young ones to death**; so many fond parents, by not correcting their children, they come to slay their children. The best way to prevent their being scourged with scorpions in hell, is to chastise them with the rod here.

So God takes up the rod; He afflicts and chastises His dearest children, but it is to prevent soul-mischief and misery; it is to prevent pride, self-love, worldliness, etc.

The rod is to purge out that vanity and folly that is bound up in the heart of the child. Proverbs 22 15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." The rod is an ordinance, as well as the word; and such parents who use it as an ordinance—praying and weeping over it—shall find it effectual for the chasing away of evil out of their children's heart. Eli and David were two very choice men, and yet, by their *fondness* on one hand, and *neglect* of this ordinance on the other hand, they ruined their sons; and whether they did not undo their souls, I shall not at this time stand to inquire.

When Moses cast away his rod, it became a serpent; and so, when parents cast away the rod of correction, it is ten to one but that their children become the brood of the serpent Proverbs 13 24, "He who spares his rod hates his son; but he who loves him chastens him often." Not only the *care*, but also the *cure* of the child—so far as the rod will reach—lies upon the hands of the parent.

The promises of God

The promises of God are as so many rich mines, they are as so many choice flowers of paradise, they are the food, life, and strength of the soul. They are as a staff to support the soul, and they are as jewelry to adorn the soul, and nourishment to enrich the soul; and therefore poor sinners should bring them forth, and lay them before the Lord, and urge God with them.

The promises of God shall certainly be performed, 2 Corinthians 1 20, they being all made in and through Christ. They are made first to Christ, and then to all who have union and communion with Him.

Sirtorius, says Plutarch, paid what he promised with mere fair words; but God pays with performance. Men many times say and unsay; they often eat their words as soon as they have spoken them; but God will never eat the words that are gone out of His mouth Isaiah 46 10-11, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure yes, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass I have purposed it, I will also do it."

The promises all issue from God's free grace, special love, and divine goodness, Hosea 14 4.

The promises of God are all as unchangeable as He is, who made them, Jeremiah 31 3.

The promises of God are all bottomed and founded upon the truth, faithfulness, and all-sufficiency of God, Malachi 3 6.

The promises of God are most sure and certain evidences of divine favor, and a declaration of the heart and goodwill of God to His poor people, Hebrews 6 12; Numbers 23 19.

The promises of God are the price of Christ's blood.

Now how should all these things encourage poor souls to be still a-pressing of God with His promises.

The dumb sinner

"**Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Matthew 7 7-8

The threefold promise annexed to the threefold precept, should encourage all Christians to be instant, fervent, and constant in prayer.

Though prayer is not the ground, nor the cause of obtaining favors and mercies from God—yet it is the means, it is the silver channel, it is the golden pipe, through which the Lord is pleased to convey to His people all temporal, spiritual, and eternal favors. God promises to give them the cream, the choicest, the sweetest of all spiritual, eternal, and temporal blessings; but mark, Ezekiel 36 37, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Though God is very prompt and ready to bestow upon His people the best and the greatest of blessings—yet He will by prayer be sought unto, for the actual enjoyment of them. He who has no heart to pray for a mercy, he has no ground to believe that God will ever give him the mercy. There is no receiving without asking, no finding without seeking, no opening without knocking. The proud beggar gets nothing from men, and **the dumb sinner** gets nothing of God. As there is no mercy too great for God to give, so there is no mercy too little for us to crave. Certainly that man has little worth in him who thinks any mercy not worth a seeking.

Failings and infirmities

God will never cast off His people for their **failings and infirmities**.

First, It is the glory of a man to pass by infirmities, Proverbs 19 11. Oh how much more, then, must it be the glory of God to pass by the infirmities of His people!

Secondly, Saints are children; and what father will cast off his children for their infirmities and weaknesses? Psalm 103 13-14; 1 Corinthians 12 27.

Thirdly, Saints are members of Christ's body; and what man will cut off a limb because there is a scab or wart upon it?

Fourthly, Saints are Christ's purchase; they are His possession, His inheritance. [Ephesians 1 22-23; 1 Corinthians 6 20; 1 Corinthians 7 23; 1 Peter 1 18-20] Now what man is there that will cast away, or cast off his purchase, his possession, his inheritance, because of thorns, bushes, or briars that grow upon it?

Fifthly, Saints are in a marriage-covenant with God, Hosea 2 19-20. Now what husband is there that will cast off his wife for her failings and infirmities? So long as a man is in covenant with God, his infirmities can't cut him off from God's mercy and grace. Now it is certain a man may have very many infirmities upon him, and yet not break his covenant with God.

In a word, if God should cast off His people for their failings and infirmities, then none of the sons or daughters of Adam could be saved "For there is not a just man upon the earth that does good and sins not," Ecclesiastes 7 20.

Oh remember

Oh remember that at such a time you went into your prayer closets with hard hearts, and dry eyes; but before you came out of your closets, ah, how sweetly, how graciously, how powerfully were you melted, and humbled before the Lord!

Oh remember how that at another time you went into your closets clouded and benighted—but came out of your closets with as glorious a shine of God upon your souls, as Moses had upon his face, when he came down from the mount from communing with God!

Oh remember how often you have gone into your closets with cold, frozen spirits—but before you came out of your closets, what a fire has God kindled in your souls, what a spirit of burning have you found in your hearts!

Oh remember how often you have gone into your closets straitened and shut up—but before you have come out, how have your souls been aflame!

Oh remember what power God has given you against corruptions in your closets, and what strength God has given you against temptations in your closets!

Oh remember the sweet discoveries of divine love that you have had when in your closets! Oh remember the secret visits, the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret whispers, the secret love-tokens, that Christ has given you in your closets!

Oh seriously ponder upon these things, and then closet duties will be sweet unto you!

A secret virtue and power

When a man finds such **a secret virtue and power** running through his closet-duties—as wounds and weakens his beloved corruption, as breaks the strength and the power of his special sin, as sets his heart more fully, resolutely, and constantly against his darling lust, as stirs up a greater rage, and a more bitter hatred, and a more fierce indignation against the toad in the bosom—then certainly he has had communion with God.

Isaiah 2 20, "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they have made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats." In the day wherein God should take these poor hearts into communion with Himself, their hearts should be filled with such rage and indignation against their most delectable and desirable idols, that they should take not only those made of trees and stones—but even their most precious and costly idols, those who were made of silver and gold, and cast them to the moles and to the bats, to note their horrible hatred and indignation against them. Idolatry was the darling-sin of the Jews; their hearts were so exceedingly affected and delighted with their idols, that they did not care what they spent upon them Isaiah 46 6, "They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a God they fall down, yes, they worship it." The word here used for lavish, in the Hebrew, signifies properly to waste, or spend riotously; they set so light by their treasure, that they cared not what they spent upon their idols. God gave them gold and silver as pledges of His favor and bounty, and they lavish it out upon their idols, as if God had hired them to be wicked.

Oh, but when God should come and take these poor wretches into a close and near communion with Himself, then you shall find their wrath and rage to rise against their idols, as you may see in that Isaiah 30 19-21. Their communion with God is more than hinted; but mark, Isaiah 30 22, "Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them—Away with you!" None defile, deface, detest, and disgrace their idols like those who are taken into communion with God. Fellowship with God will make a man cast away, as a menstruous cloth, those very idols, in which he has most delighted, and with which he has been most pleased and enamored.

Idols were Ephraim's bosom-sin. Hosea 4 17, "Ephraim is joined," or glued, as the Hebrew has it, "to idols; let him alone." Oh! but when you find Ephraim taken into close communion with God, as you do in that Hosea 14 4-7, then you shall find another spirit upon him Hosea 14 8, "Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols?" I have had too much to do with them already, I will never have to do with them any more. Oh! how does my soul detest and abhor them, and rise up against them. Oh! how do I now more loathe and abominate them, than ever I have formerly loved them, or delighted in them. After the return of the Jews out of Babylon, they so hated and abhorred idols, that in the time of the Romans they chose rather to die, than allow the eagle, which was the imperial insignia, to be set up in their temple.

Though closet-duties are weak in themselves—yet when a man has communion with God in them, then they prove exceedingly powerful to the casting down of strongholds, and vain imaginations, and every high thing and thought, which exalts itself against the knowledge of God, 2 Corinthians 10 4-5. When a man comes out of his closet with a heart more fully and steadfastly set against every known sin—but especially against his bosom-sin, his darling-sin, his Delilah which he played and sported himself most with, and which he has hugged with pleasure and delight in his bosom—then certainly he has had private communion with God.

After Moses had enjoyed forty days' private communion with God in the mount, how did his heart rise, and his anger wax hot against the molten calf that his people had made! Exodus 32 19-20, "When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it." Moses had never more intimate fellowship with God than now, and he never exhibited so much holy zeal, anger, and indignation against sin as now.

When a man comes off from the mount of closet-duties with a greater hatred, anger, wrath, and indignation against bosom-sins, darling-sins, complexion-sins, which were once as dear to him as right hands or right eyes, or as Delilah was to Samson, or Herodias to Herod, or Isaac to Abraham, or Joseph to Jacob, then certainly he has had communion with God in those duties. When a man finds his beloved sins, his Delilahs, which, like the prince of devils, command all other sins, to fall before his closet-duties, as Dagon fell before the ark, or as Goliath fell before David—then assuredly he has had fellowship with God in them.

Pliny writes of some families which had secret marks on their bodies, peculiar to those of that line. Certainly, there are no people—but have some sin or sins; some secret marks on their souls, that may in a peculiar way be called theirs. Now when in private duties they find the bent of their hearts, and the purposes, resolutions, and inclinations of their souls more raised, inflamed, and set against these, they may safely and comfortably conclude, that they have had communion with God in them.

O sirs! there is no no bosom-sin so sweet or profitable, that is worth burning in hell for, or worth shutting out of heaven for; and therefore, in all your private duties and services, labor after that communion with God in them, that may break the neck and heart of your most bosom-sins. When Darius fled before Alexander, that he might run the faster out of danger, he threw away his massive crown from his head. As ever you would be safe from eternal danger, throw away your golden and your silver idols, throw away your bosom-sins, your darling lusts.

Man's whole life is but a lingering death; man no sooner begins to live—but he begins to die.

Secret prayer sweetly inclines and strongly disposes a Christian to all other pious duties and services.

Private prayer is a golden key to unlock the mysteries of the word unto us. The knowledge of many choice and blessed truths, are but the returns of private prayer. The Word dwells most richly in their hearts—who are most in pouring out their hearts before God in their closets. Certainly that Christian, who in private prayer lies most at the feet of Jesus Christ—he shall understand most of the mind of Christ in the gospel, and he shall have most of heaven and the things of his own peace brought down into his heart.

There is no service wherein Christians have such a near, familiar, and friendly fellowship with God as in private prayer; neither is there any service wherein God does more delight to make known His truth and faithfulness, His grace and goodness, His mercy and bounty, His beauty and glory to poor souls, than in secret prayer. Private prayer crowns God with the honor and glory which are due to His name; and God crowns private prayer with a revelation of those blessed weighty truths to his servants, that are a sealed book to others.

One hour's communion with God in one's closet, is to be preferred before the greatest and best company in the world.

A man whose soul is conversant with God in a closet, in a hole, behind the door, or in a desert, a den, a dungeon—shall find more real pleasure, more choice delight, and more full contentment, than in the palace of a prince.

Our heavenly Father hears and observes our private prayers, and bottles up all our secret tears. He is not a stranger to our closet desires, wrestlings, breathings, hungerings, and thirstings. He loves to lade the wings of private prayer with the sweetest, choicest, and chief blessings. Saints often meet with the best wine and with the strongest cordials—when they are all alone with God.

All tears will never be totally wiped from our eyes, until all sin is totally taken out of our hearts.

The very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of a man's soul into the bosom of God. Prayer is nothing but the breathing out before the Lord, that which was first breathed into us by the Spirit of the Lord. Prayer is nothing but a choice, a free, a sweet, and familiar fellowship of the soul with God.

Some saints have never had so much of heaven brought down into their hearts, as when they have been with God in private prayer. Oh the secret manifestations of divine love, the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret influences, the secret communion with God, that many a precious Christian has had in the most solitary places.

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01 Epistler Dedicatory

The Privy Key of Heaven

(A Discourse of Closet Prayer)

by Thomas Brooks, published during
the awful plague of London in 1665.

"But when you pray, go into your room, close
the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.
Then your Father, who sees what is done in
secret, will reward you." Mat_6 6

EPISTLE DEDICATORY

Beloved in Our Dear Lord Jesus,
The Lord at several times, and in several ways, has exercised you all in the furnace of affliction. This book may reach you all, and speak to you all—when I *can* not, or when I *may* not, or which is more, when I *am* not.

Dear friends, many and great have been the breaches that the Lord has made upon your persons, upon your near and dear relations, and upon your sweetest comforts and contentments. There is not one of you but may truly say with Job, "He breaks me with breach upon breach," Job_16 14. God has chastised you all round with various rods; and oh that the Lord would help you all to "hear the rod, and him who has appointed it," Mic_6 9.

Now that you may give me leave a little to open and apply to your particulars, that

"The Lord's voice cries unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall hear your name **hear the rod, and him who has appointed it**." Mic_6 9

The matter that I shall offer to your consideration from this scripture, will be not only of special concernment to yourselves, but also of high concernment to all sorts and ranks of men and women, in this sad day, when the sword devours on the one hand, and the pestilence rages on the other hand.

"The Lord's voice cries unto the city." Tremellius turns it thus, "The voice of the Lord does preach unto this city, for what the matter is, you see hear you the rod," etc. This city, namely, Jerusalem, and so consequently to all the Israelites; for in this city all offices and duties of godliness and humanity were more religiously performed, or to be performed, than in any other place, because of the presence and majesty of God that was among them. "But your Majesty sees what wickedness is practiced among them," as is evident in the verses following.

"Cries." The word is from *kara*, which signifies,

First, "To cry aloud," or "to make a noise," Isa_58 1; "cry aloud" there is kara. The word signifies, to cry so loud as that all may hear that have ears to hear.

Secondly, The word signifies, "openly to proclaim, preach, or publish a thing." Exo_33 19, "I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you." Here is the word kara.

Thirdly, The word signifies, "to cry out." Gen_39 15, "I lifted up my voice and cried." Here is kara.

"And the man of wisdom shall see your name." Vethushiia properly signifies essence; and, therefore, according to the Hebrew, the words should be read thus, "And the man of essence shall see your name," etc., that is, he who is a man indeed, he who is not a sot, a stock, a stone. Most men are men of folly, and so not worthy of the name of men; but as for such as are truly wise, they "shall see your name." *There is a great measure of spiritual art, of holy and heavenly wisdom required, both to enable a man to hear the voice of the rod and to understand the language of the rod.* This wisdom is too high for a fool, Pro_24 7.

"Shall see your name." Now the Hebrew word here used, signifies to fear; and so the words will run smoothly thus, "The man of wisdom, or of essence, shall fear your name," considering that, it is majesty itself that cries, and that he is immediately to deal with God himself, and not with a poor, weak, mortal worm.

"Hear the rod." The word hear signifies,

First, "To mark, observe, and attend to what is said." Gen_29 33, "The Lord has heard that I was hated;" that is, "he has marked it, he has observed it." So here, Oh mark the rod! Oh observe the rod! Oh attend to what is spoken by the rod!

Secondly, The word signifies, "to understand what is spoken;" so Gen_42 23, "They knew not that Joseph understood them." In the Hebrew it is, "that Joseph heard them." Now to hear the rod, is to understand what is spoken to us by the rod.

Thirdly, The word signifies, "to believe a thing reported to be true;" so Exo_6 9, "They hearkened not unto Moses," that is, "they did not believe the report that Moses made." "Hear the rod," that is, "believe the report the rod makes." The rod reports, that of all evils sin is the greatest evil; and that of all bitters, sin is the greatest bitter. Oh believe the report of the rod! The rod reports, that God is angry, that God is displeased. Oh believe its report! The rod reports the creatures to be mere vanity and vexation of spirit. Oh believe its report! The rod reports our nearest and dearest comforts, contentments, and enjoyments to be mixed, mutable, and momentary. Oh believe its report! The rod reports sin to be vile, and the world to be vain, and heaven to be glorious, and Christ to be most precious. Oh believe its report!

"The rod." The Hebrew word *matte*, that is here rendered rod, has three significations

First, It denotes "power and strength " Psa_2 9, "a rod of iron."

Secondly, It denotes "rigid and harsh government " Isa_14 5, "The Lord has broken the staff," or rod, "of the wicked;" that is, "their rigorous and cruel government." Nebuchadnezzar had sorely afflicted the children of Judah; he was a rod, that broke them in pieces, and ruled over them with much rigor in Babylon.

Thirdly, It denotes "sore afflictions and heavy judgments " Psa_89 32, "I will visit your transgressions with a rod." And thus you are to understand the word rod in the text.

"And him who has appointed it." It is God who appoints the rod, and ordains it for the revenge of the quarrel of his covenant. The Hebrew word signifies properly "to appoint" or "constitute." It is God who appoints the rod, and who constitutes it to do what service he pleases. It is God who has not only a permissive—but also an active, hand, in all the afflictions that come upon his people.

And let thus much suffice for the opening of the words.

Now, though this choice garden affords many sweet flowers—yet I shall only present you with one, which is this, namely,

That **all the afflictions, troubles, and trials which God lays upon His people, are his rod. It is their highest and greatest concernment to hear the voice of the rod, and to learn those lessons that God would have them learn by the rod.**

For the opening and clearing up of this important point, I shall endeavor these two things

First, To show you in what respects afflictions are like unto a rod.

Secondly, To show you what those special lessons are, that you are to learn by the rod.

Dear friends,
The following discourse on closet prayer I heartily recommend to your serious perusal. I have many reasons to hope, that when you have once read it over, you will be more in love with closet prayer than ever, and that you will set a higher price upon closet prayer than ever, and that you will make a better and fuller improvement of closet prayer than ever yet you have done. Consider what I say in my epistle to the reader, and labor so to manage this little treatise, which now I put into your hands, that God may be glorified, your own souls edified, comforted, and encouraged in the ways of the Lord, and that you may be "my crown and joy, in the great day of our Lord Jesus," 1Th_2 19-20.

Christian Reader—The epistle dedicatory being so large, I shall do little more than give you **the grounds and reasons of sending forth this little piece into the world**, especially in such a day as this is. Now, my reasons are these

1. First, Because God by his present dispensations calls more loudly for closet prayer now, than he has done in those last twenty years that are now passed over our heads. See more of this in the 16th argument for closet prayer.

2. Secondly, Because I have several reasons to fear that many Christians do not clearly nor fully understand the necessity, excellency, and usefulness of this subject, and that many, oh that I could not say any, live in too great a neglect of this indispensable duty; and that more than a few, for lack of light, err in the very practice of it.

3. Thirdly, For the refreshing, support, and encouragement of all those churches of Christ that walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Spirit, etc., especially that particular church to whom I stand related.

4. Fourthly, To preserve and keep up the power of religion and godliness both in men's houses, hearts, and lives. The power of religion and godliness lives, thrives, or dies, as closet prayer lives, thrives, or dies. Godliness never rises to a higher pitch than when men keep closest to their closets, etc.

5. Fifthly, Because closet prayer is a most sovereign remedy, a most precious antidote of God's own prescribing, against the plague that now rages in the midst of us, 1Ki_8 37-39, etc.

6. Sixthly, Because **every man is that really which he is secretly**. Never tell me, how handsomely, how neatly, how bravely, this or that man acts his part before others; but tell me, if you can, how he acts his part before God in his closet; for the man is that certainly, which he is secretly. There are many who sweat upon the stage that are cold in their closets.

7. Seventhly, Though many worthies have done worthily upon all other parts of prayer—yet there are none either of a former or later date, that have fallen under my eye, who have written any treatise on this subject. I have not a little wondered that so many eminent writers should pass over this great and princely duty of closet-prayer, either with a few brief touches, or else in a very great silence. If several Bodies of Divinity are consulted, you will find that all they say clearly and distinctly as to closet-prayer, may be brought into a very narrow compass, if not into a nutshell. I have also inquired of several old disciples, whether among all the thousand sermons that they have *heard* in their days, that ever they have heard one sermon on closet-prayer? and they have answered, No. I have also inquired of them, whether ever they had *read* any treatise on that subject? and they have answered, No. And truly this has been no small encouragement to me, to make an offer of my mite; and if this small attempt of mine shall be so blessed, as to provoke others who have better heads, and hearts, and hands, than any I have, to do Christ and his people more service, in the handling of this choice point in a more copious way than what I have been able to reach unto, I shall therein rejoice.

8. Eighthly, and lastly, That favor, that good acceptance and fair quarter that my other poor labors have found, not only in this nation—but in other countries also, has put me upon putting pen to paper once more; and I hope that the good will of him who "dwelt in the bush," will rest upon this, as it has to the glory of free grace rested upon my former endeavors. I could add other reasons—but let these suffice.

Good reader, when you are in your closet, pray hard for a poor, weak, worthless worm, that I may be found faithful and fruitful to the death, that so at last I may receive a crown of life. So wishing you all happiness both in this lower and in that upper world, I rest,
Yours in our dear Lord Jesus,
Thomas Brooks.

02 In what respects afflictions are like a rod

In what respects are afflictions like a rod?

"The Lord's voice cries unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall hear your name **hear the rod, and him who has appointed it**." Mic_6 9

I answer, In these seven respects afflictions are like unto a rod.

(1.) First, **The rod is never made use of—but when no other means will prevail with the child.** It is so here; God never takes up the rod, he never afflicts his people, until he has tried all fair ways and means to humble them and reform them, 2Ch_36 15, seq., Mat_23 37-38. And when none of the offers of grace, the tenders of mercy, the wooings of Christ, the strivings of the Spirit, nor the smart debates of conscience, will awaken them, nor work upon them, then God takes up the rod, and sometimes whips them until the blood comes. But,

(2.) Secondly, **Parents choose whatever rods they please, to correct their children with.** The child shall not choose what rod he pleases to be corrected with. Oh, no! It is the prerogative of the father to choose the rod. The father may choose and use either a great rod or a little rod, a long rod or a short rod, a rod made of rosemary branches or a rod made up of a green birch. It is so here; God chooses what rod—whatever affliction he pleases, to exercise his people with, Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; Lam_3 9-18. You read in the Scriptures of very many rods—but they are all of God's choosing Amo_3 6, "Is there any evil in the city, and has not the Lord done it?" Though there be many rods to be found in the city—yet there is not one of them but is of God's choosing. Rth_1 13, "It grieves me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." Rth_1 21, "I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty; why then call you me Naomi, seeing the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" Isa_45 7, "I form the light, and create darkness I make peace, and create evil I, the Lord, do all these things." Mic_1 12, "For the inhabitants of Maroth waited carefully for good—but evil came down from the Lord unto the gates of Jerusalem." David was whipped with many rods—but they were all of God's own choosing, Psa_39 9; and Job was whipped with many rods—but they were all of God's own choosing, Job 1. But,

(3.) Thirdly, **Parents take no pleasure, they take no delight, to use the rod.** Every lash the father gives the child, fetches blood from his own heart. The father corrects the child, and sighs over the child; he whips the child, and at the same time weeps over the child. Nothing goes more against the parents' heart, than the bringing of their children under the rod of correction. It is so here, Lam_3 33, "For he does not afflict willingly," or, as the Hebrew runs, "he does not afflict from his heart, nor grieve the children of men." You often read that God delights in mercy, Mic_7 15; but where do you once read that God delights in severity, or in dealing roughly with his people? God very rarely takes up the rod but when our sins have put a force upon him, 2Ch_36 16; Jer_5 19. It is grievous to God to be a-grieving his people; it is a pain unto him to be a-punishing of them Hos_11 8, "*How* can I give you up, Ephraim? *How* can I hand you over, Israel? *How* can I treat you like Admah? *How* can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused."

My justice, says God, calls upon me to rain hell out of heaven upon you, as once I did upon Sodom and Gomorrah; but then mercy interposes her four several *hows* how? how? how? how? how shall I give you up? God puts these four piteous interrogations to himself, because none else in heaven or earth could answer them. The prophet brings in God speaking after the manner of men, who, being provoked a thousand thousand ways by the vanities and follies of their children, think to give them up to take their own courses, and to look no more after them; but then their affections begin to work, and their hearts begin to melt, and they begin to interrogate themselves thus "How shall we give up these children? for though they be disobedient children—yet they are our children; how can we turn them out of doors? how can we disown them? how can we disinherit them? for though they are rebellious children—yet they are our children, etc.

Afflictions are called God's work, yes, his "strange work;" his act, yes, "his strange act;" as if God were out of his element when he is afflicting or chastising his people, Isa_28 21. But,

(4.) Fourthly, **The rod is smarting, grievous, and troublesome; and so are afflictions to our natures.** Heb_12 11, "Now, no chastening for the present seems to be joyous—but grievous." Flesh and blood startles and is troubled at the least trouble. Affliction is a sort of remedy which makes most sick. Some write that tigers will grow mad, and tear their own flesh, and rend themselves in pieces, if they do but hear drums sound about them. Were not Job and Jeremiah such tigers, who, in the day of their afflictions, did more than curse the day of their birth? Job 3; Jeremiah 20. Oh what a bitter cup, what a heavy burden was affliction to them! Job_10 1, "My soul is weary of my life." Job_7 15, "My soul chooses strangling and death rather than life." Psa_6 6, "I am weary with my groaning." Psa_69 1-3, "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." Doubtless many good men have sat under Elijah his juniper, 1Ki_19 4, wishing themselves out of the world, if it might stand with divine pleasure, that they might rest from their sins and sorrows, and be rid of their many burdens and bondages, looking upon life as little better than a hell, were it not for the hopes of a heaven hereafter. But,

(5.) Fifthly, **When parents take up the rod into their hands, they will not lay it down until they have subdued the spirits of their children, and brought them to submit and to kiss the rod, and to sit still and quiet before them.** It is so here when God takes up the rod, he will not lay it down until he has brought us to lie quietly at his feet Lev_26 40-42, "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land." When God takes up the rod, his children must either bow or break; they must say, the Lord is righteous; they must kiss the rod of correction—or else destruction will come like a whirlwind upon them, Isa_5 3; Isa_5 6.

It is reported of the lion, that he spares those creatures that fall down before him, and submit unto him; but as for those that endeavor to run from him, or to contend with him, those he tears in pieces. It is just so with the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as you may see in Hos_5 14-15. "For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me."

King Edward riding furiously after a servant of his that had highly displeased him, with a drawn sword in his hand as purposing to kill him, seeing him submit, and on bended knee pleading for his life, did not only put up his sword—but also spared him, and received him into his favor. The King of kings will never put up his sword when once he has drawn it—until his people fall on their knees, and submit unto him. God never left chastising of Ephraim until he had brought him to his bow, until he had made him submit, and kiss the rod, Jer_31 18-20. But,

(6.) Sixthly, **Afflictions are called a rod, in respect to the hand which lays them on.** Though affliction be a rod, it is a rod in a Father's hand. The sword is in the judge's hand, Joh_18 11, and the cudgel is in the master's hand; but the rod is in the father's hand, Heb_12 6-9. When Balaam's donkey offended him, he wished for a sword to slay him, Num_22 29; but so does not God. When we do most highly provoke him, he does not take up a sword to slay us—but only a rod to scourge us and chastise us, as kind fathers do their dearest children. But,

(7.) Seventhly and lastly, **Afflictions are called a rod, in regard of the ends to which they serve.** A rod is not to kill—but to cure; it is not for destruction—but for correction. When David gave a full commission to his soldiers against Absalom, it was not to slay him—but to restrain him; it was not to ruin him—but to reduce him to his former obedience. The application is easy. We can as well live without our daily bread—as without our daily rod.

03 God's purpose and end of taking up the rod

God's purpose and end of taking up the rod

"The Lord's voice cries unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall hear your name **hear the rod, and him who has appointed it**." Mic_6 9

Now, God's purpose and end of taking up the rod are these

[1.] First and more generally, **It is for the good of the child, and not for his hurt.** It is so here. God takes up the rod—but it is for the good of his people Gen_50 20, "But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive." Divine goodness did so overmaster the plotted malignity of Joseph's brethren as that it made a blessed medicine of a most deadly poison. Jer_24 5, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." When Israel was dismissed out of Egypt, Exodus 40, it was with gold and earrings; and when Judah was dismissed out of Babylon, it was with great gifts, jewels, and all necessary utensils, Ezra 1. So Rom_8 28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." This text, like Moses's tree cast into the bitter waters of affliction, may make them sweet and wholesome to drink of. But,

[2.] Secondly, and more particularly, **The rod is to make the child sensible of his folly and vanity.** Pro_10 13, "In the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found; but the rod is for the back of him who is void of understanding." So it is here God takes up the rod—but it is to make his people sensible of their folly and vanity; it is to make them look up to him, and to look into conscience, and to look out to their lives. **God's house of correction is his school of instruction.** His lashes are our lessons, his scourges are our schoolmasters, and his chastisements are our corrections. Hence both the Hebrews and Greeks express *chastening* and *teaching* by one and the same word, because *teaching* is the true end of *chastening*, according to that in the proverb, "Pain makes wit, and vexation gives understanding." [Isa_26 9; Psa_94 12; Pro_3 12-13; Job_36 8-10]

Afflictions are a Christian's looking-glass, by which he may see how to dress his own soul, and to mend whatever is amiss. They are pills made up by a heavenly hand on purpose to clear our eyesight; 1Ki_17 18, "And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with you, O you man of God? Have you come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" If God had not taken away her son, her sin had not been brought to remembrance. It was the speech of a holy man in his sickness "In this disease," said he, "I have learned how great God is, and what the evil of sin is. I never knew to purpose what God was before, nor what sin was before." The cross of affliction opens men's eyes, as the tasting of honey did Jonathan's. "Here," as that martyr phrased it, "we are still a-learning our A, B, Cs, and our lesson is never past Christ's cross, and our walking is still home by weeping-cross." But,

[3.] Thirdly, **The rod is used to prevent further folly, mischief, and misery.** Pro_23 13-14, "Withhold not correction from the child, for if you beat him with the rod, he shall not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell." It is said of the ape, that she hugs her young ones to death; so many fond parents, by not correcting their children, they come to slay their children. The best way to prevent their being scourged with scorpions in hell, is to chastise them with the rod here. So God takes up the rod; he afflicts and chastises his dearest children—but it is to prevent soul-mischief and misery; it is to prevent pride, self-love, worldliness, etc.

Paul was one of the holiest men who ever lived on earth; he was called by some an earthly angel, and yet he needed the rod, he needed a thorn in the flesh, to prevent pride; witness the doubling of those words in one verse, "lest I should be exalted above measure, lest I should be exalted above measure," 2Co_12 7-9. If Paul had not been buffeted, who knows how highly he might have been exalted in his own pride? Prudent physicians often give their patients medicines to prevent diseases; and so does the physician of souls to his dearest servants, Job_40 4-5; Hos_2 6-7; Job_33 17; Job_33 19; "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man."

Afflictions are the Lord's drawing-plasters, by which he draws out the core of pride, earthliness, self-love, covetousness, etc. Pride was one of man's first sins, and is still the root and source of all other sins. Now, to prevent it, God many times chastens man with pain, yes, with strong pain, upon his bed Job_34 31-32, "I have endured my punishment; I will no longer act wickedly. Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I won't do it again." The burnt child dreads the fire. Sin is but a bitter sweet; it is an evil worse than hell itself. Look, as salt brine preserves things from putrefying, and as salt marshes keep the sheep from rotting, so sanctified rods, sanctified afflictions, preserves and keeps the people of God from sinning. But,

[4.] Fourthly, **The rod is to purge out that vanity and folly that is bound up in the heart of the child.** Pro_22 15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child—but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." The rod is an ordinance, as well as the word; and such parents that use it as an ordinance, praying and weeping over it, shall find it effectual for the chasing away of evil out of their children's heart. Eli and David were two very choice men, and yet, by their fondness on one hand, and neglect of this ordinance on the other hand, they ruined their sons; and whether they did not undo their souls, I shall not at this time stand to inquire. When Moses cast away his rod, it became a serpent, Exo_4 3; and so, when parents cast away the rod of correction, it is ten to one but that their children become the brood of the serpent Pro_13 24, "He who spares his rod hates his son; but he who loves him chastens him betimes." Not only the care—but also the cure of the child, so far as the rod will reach, lies upon the hands of the parent.

Now afflictions are like a rod in this respect also, for, as they are sanctified, **they cleanse and purge away the dross, the filth, and the scum of the Christian** Isa_1 25, "And I will turn my hand upon you, and purely purge away your dross, and take away all your tin;" Isa_27 9, "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin;" Dan_11 35, "And some of them of understanding shall fall" (that is, "into great afflictions"), "to try them, and to purge them, and to make them white, even to the time of the end." All the harm the fire did to the three children, or rather the three champions, was to burn off their cords, Dan_3 23-24. Our lusts are cords of vanity—but the fire of affliction shall burn them up Zec_13 9, "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried they shall call on my name, and I will hear them I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God." Sharp afflictions are a fire—to purge out our dross, and to make our graces shine; they are a potion—to carry away ill humours; they are cold frosts—to destroy the vermin; they are a tempestuous sea—to purge the wine from its dregs; they are like the north wind—which dries up the vapors, that purges the blood, and quickens the spirits; they are a sharp corrosive—to eat out the dead flesh. Afflictions are compared to washing—which takes away the filth of the soul, as water does the filth of the body, Mat_10 38-39. God would not rub so hard, were it not to fetch out the dirt and spots that are in his people's hearts.

[5.] Fifthly, **The rod serves to improve that good that is in the child** Pro_29 15, "The rod and reproof gives wisdom—but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame." So afflictions serve to improve our graces Heb_12 10, "For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure—but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness;" that is, that we might more and more be partakers of his holiness. Heb_12 11, "Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous—but grievous nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby." Hence it is that the saints glory in tribulation Rom_5 3-4, "And not only so—but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." **Grace always thrives most when saints are under the rod.** When Christians are under the rod, then their graces do not only bud—but blossom and bring forth fruit, as Aaron's rod did, Num_17 8. The snuffing of the candle makes it burn the brighter. God beats and bruises his children, to make them burn the brighter; he bruises his spices, to make them send forth the greater aromatic fragrance.

Bernard compares afflictions to the teasle, which, though it be sharp and scratching, is to make the cloth more pure and fine. The Jews were always best when they were in an afflicted condition. Well-waters arising from deep springs are hotter in the winter than they are in the summer. Stars shine brightest in the darkest nights. Vines grow the better for bleeding, and gold shines the better for scouring. Juniper smells sweetest when in the fire; camomile, the more you tread it, the more you spread it. O sirs! this is a real and a rare truth—but seldom thought on, namely, that God will sometimes more carry on the growth and improvement of grace by a cross, by an affliction, than by an ordinance, Jas_1 3-4; Jas_4 8-9. Afflictions ripen the saint's graces, 2Co_1 5. Sooner or later, God will make every rod, yes, every twig in every rod, to be an ordinance to every afflicted saint.

By afflictions, God many times revives, quickens, and recovers the decayed graces of his people. By afflictions, God many times inflames that love which is cold, and he strengthens that faith which is failing, and he puts life into those hopes which are languishing, and new spirits into those joys and comforts which are withering and dying. Musk, say some, when it has lost its sweetness, if it be put into the sink among filth, it recovers its sweetness again. So does sharp afflictions recover and revive our decayed graces.

I have read a story of a sexton, who went into the church at night to rob a woman who had been buried the day before with a gold ring upon her finger. Now, when he had opened the grave and coffin, and loosed the sheet, he fell a-rubbing and chafing her finger to get off the gold ring; and with rubbing and chafing of it, her spirits returned, she having been but in a swoon before, and she revived, and lived many years after. Sharp afflictions are but the rubbing and chafing of our graces. The smarting rod abases the loveliness of the world, which entices us; it abates the lustiness of the flesh within, which incites us to vanity and folly; all which tend much to the recovering and reviving of decayed graces. But,

[6.] The sixth end to which the rod serves, and that is, **To try the child, to make a discovery of the spirit of the child.** Some parents never see so much of the badness of the hearts of their children, as they do when they bring them under the rod; and other parents never see so much of the goodness of the hearts of their children as they do when they chastise them with the rod. It is so here. When God afflicts some, oh the pride! the stoutness! the crossness! the hardness! the peevishness and stubbornness of spirit, that they discover! Isa_1 5; Jer_5 3; Exo_5 2; Jer_44 15-19. When he afflicts others, oh the murmuring! the roaring! the complaining! the howling! the fretting! the vexing! and the quarreling spirit that they discover! Amo_4 6-13; Num_14 27; Num_14 29; Num_14 36; Deu_1 27; Isa_58 3-4; Isa_59 11; Hos_7 14-15; Jon_4 1-5; Jon_4 8-9.

Sometimes when God afflicts his dearest people, oh what a spirit of faith! what a spirit of prayer! what a spirit of love! what a spirit of patience! what a spirit of meekness! what a spirit of humbleness! what a spirit of submissiveness do they discover! Job_13 15; 2Ch_16 12; Isa_26 16-17; Hos_5 14-15; Job_1 20-22; Lev_10 1-3; 1Sa_3 18; 2Ki_20 16-19. And at other times, when God afflicts his poor people, oh what a spirit of unbelief! what a spirit of slavish fear! what a spirit of impatience! what a spirit of displeasedness, etc., do they discover! Gen_15 2-3; Gen_12 13; Gen_12 19; Gen_20 2; Gen_20 5; Gen_26 7-11; Psa_31 22; Psa_116 11; 1Sa_21 10-15; Job_3 3-13; Jer_20 14-18. By sharp afflictions, God tries the graces of his people, and discovers what is in the hearts of his people, Deu_8 2; Psa_66 10-11; Rev_3 18; 1Pe_1 6-7. The fire tries the gold as well as the touchstone. Diseases try the skill of the physician, and tempests try the skill of the pilot. Every smarting rod is a touchstone, both to try our graces and to discover our spirits. Prudent fathers will sometimes cross their children, to try to discover the dispositions of their children, Heb_12 5-21. And so does the Father of spirits deal sometimes with his children.

The manner of the Psylli, which are a kind of people of that temper and constitution that no venom will hurt them, is this—if they suspect any child to be none of their own, they set an adder upon it to sting it; and if the child cries, and the flesh swells, they cast it away as a spurious child; but if it does not nor cry, nor is never the worse for it, then they account it for their own, and make very much of it. The application is easy. But,

[7.] The seventh and last end of the rod, is **to prepare and fit the chastised for greater services, favors, and mercies**. Many a child and many a servant had never been so fit for eminent services as they are, had they not been under a smarting rod. It is very usual with God to cast them into very great afflictions, and to lay them under grievous smarting rods, that so he may prepare and fit them for some high and eminent services in this world. **Joseph** would never have been so fit to be governor of Egypt, and to preserve the visible church of God alive in the world—if he had not been sold into Egypt, Gen_41 40-44; if his feet had not been hurt in the stocks, and if the irons had not entered into his soul, Gen_45 7-8. **Moses** would never have been so fit to be a leader and a deliverer of Israel as he was—if he had not been banished forty years in the wilderness before, Exo_2 15. Nor would **David's** crown have fit so well, nor so close, nor so long on his head as it did—had he not for some years before been hunted as a partridge in the wilderness, 1Sa_26 20. Nor would the **three children**, or rather the three champions, have been fit for so high a rule—had they not been first cast into the fiery furnace, Dan_3 29-30. Nor would **Daniel** have been so fit for that exceeding high honor, and glory, and greatness to which he was exalted—had he not been first cast among the lions, Dan_6 25, et seq. And so if **Esther** had never been a poor captive maid, she would never have been a queen, and so would never have been instrumental in the preservation of the church of God in her day. **Heman** was one of the best and wisest men in the world in his day, 1Ki_4 31; and this God brought him to by training of him up in the school of affliction, as you may evidently see in Psalms 88.

That verse of the apostle in 2Co_1 4, deserves to be written in letters of gold, "Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be *able* to comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God." Mark that word able. Oh, it is one of the hardest and noblest works in all Christianity to be able divinely to comfort others that are in troubles; and yet by sufferings God fits and prepares his people for this noble and difficult service.

Luther was of opinion that to *comfort a distressed conscience* was a greater work than to raise the dead to life. And yet by inward and outward sufferings, God fits his people for this great work.

And thus you see in what respects afflictions are compared to a rod.

04 Twenty special lessons to learn by the rod

Twenty special lessons which you are to learn by the rod

"The Lord's voice cries unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall hear your name **hear the rod, and him who has appointed it**." Mic_6 9

The second thing I am to do, is to show you **those special lessons that you are to learn by the rod**, or if you please, by the raging pestilence which is now in England. Now they are these,

(1.) The first lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is, **to know what the particular message or errand is, which the rod has to deliver to you in the day of your distress and trouble.** Your first work is to do as David did, in 2Sa_21 1. He humbly inquires of the Lord to know the particular reason why he sent a famine among them. You must do as Job does Job_10 2, "Show me, O Lord, why you contend with me." Job would sincerely know the reason of the controversy between God and him. One well observes on the text, "that Job was very desirous to know whether God afflicted him for sin or for trial—not to satisfy his curiosity—but his conscience." Elihu's counsel to Job must here take place Job_34 31-32, "Surely it is fit to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Job it seems was yet in the dark as to the particular cause or reason why the Lord had so grievously afflicted him; and therefore he is very importunate with God that he would graciously point out the sin for which he had so sorely smitten him. Your proceedings, says Job, to my understanding seem to be very strange and severe. I am more afflicted than others, and yet I do not know wherein I have sinned more than others; why I should be so condemned; why you are so hot against me, and why you have multiplied so many unheard of miseries against me; and why you have so greatly subjected me to the saddest and sourest censures of others—as if I were the worst of sinners and the basest of hypocrites. I know not; and therefore, O Lord! I humbly desire that you would not deal with me according to your absolute power—but let me know the true grounds and causes of all my heavy sorrows and miseries.

And so he is at it again, in that Job_13 23, "How many are my iniquities and sins! make me to know my transgression and my sin." My plagues, O Lord! are unparalleled; if my sins are such, let me know it, says Job. My calamities transcend the calamities of all others; if my sins do so, let them not be hidden from my eyes, O Lord! My load, O Lord! is heavier than others; and therefore if my sins are greater than others, let me see them, let me understand them. Infirmities and weaknesses, I confess, do hang upon me; they are inherent in me, and they do too often issue and flow from me. But as for enormities or wickednesses, neither my censorious friends, nor yet my worst enemies, no, nor yet my own conscience, will ever be able to make any just or clear proof against me. O Lord! I have many spots upon me—but if there are any upon me which are not the spots of your people, let me see them, let me know them, that I may abhor myself, and justify you, and that I may say my friends are righteous in their censures, and I have done wickedly before the Lord.

Sometimes afflictions are sent only for trial and instruction, and not at all for sin. This is evident in the case of Job, and in the case of the blind man, whose afflictions, though they were very great and grievous—yet were they not for sin but for trial, Joh_9 1, et seq.

Now, though this is true—yet it must be granted that commonly sin is the meritorious cause, the procuring cause, of all afflictions, Mic_1 5-10, Amo_2 4-6. Sin ordinarily is the original foundation of all our troubles and chastisements "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." Psa_89 30-33. "Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me," declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty." Jer_2 19. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Amo_3 2

Question. **But what course must we take? what means must we use, to find out that particular sin, for which God corrects us, or which has brought the rod upon us?**

Answer 1. **Observe what that sin is—which your conscience does most upbraid you with, and check you for.** Conscience is God's preacher in the bosom, Gen_42 21; Gen_50 15-17. Now, observe what that particular sin is, which conscience does most sharply and roundly correct and chastise you for; for it is ten to one—but that is the sin which has brought the rod upon you. The voice of conscience, and the voice of the rod, do usually echo one to another. It is very rare to find a difference between the language of conscience and the language of the rod. Conscience is God's deputy, God's spy, God's secretary, God's viceroy; and therefore do not despise the voice of conscience, do not turn off conscience, as Felix turned off Paul, Act_24 25. If the secret cry of conscience is, "Oh, this is for your pride, or this is for your lust, or this is for your self-love, or this is for your earthliness, or this is for your carnalness, or this is for your hypocrisy, or this is for your formality, etc.," it will be your wisdom to apply to the secret cry of conscience. But,

Answer 2. Secondly, **Seriously observe what that sin is—which your soul would have spared above all, which your soul is most unwilling to leave, and bid an everlasting farewell to.** Observe what your right hand sin, your bosom sin, your constitutional sin, your complexion sin, is; for it is a hundred to one but that God has sent the rod for the subduing of that very sin, Mic_6 6-7; Est_5 13. Commonly by the rod God points at the mortifying of that particular sin to which the heart stands most strongly inclined. But,

Answer 3. Thirdly, **Observe what that sin is, which does most maim and mar your confidence and boldness in all your addresses and approaches to God**. 1Jn_3 20-21; for doubtless that is the sin which God would subdue and bring under by the rod. But,

Answer 4. Fourthly, **Observe what the affliction, what the pain, what the disease, what the punishment is—which you are under; for sometimes a person may run and read his sin in his very punishment**. Jdg_1 7, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them." Now shall Adonibezek, a heathen prince, run and read his sin in his punishment; and shall not a Christian much more? Shall not grace do as much as blind human nature? Look, as a man may sometimes guess at the disease of the patient, by the prudent observing of the physician's bill; so may he sometimes guess at the particular sin that God would have destroyed, by the punishment which is inflicted. God usually, sooner or later, meets with men, and pays them home in their own coin.

Is the judgment shame? Then the sin was pride, Hos_2 8-9. Is the judgment poverty, famine? Then the sin was abuse of abundance. Is the judgment oppression? Then the sin was unmercifulness. Is the judgment loss of children? Then the sin was inordinate love to them. Eli and David were too indulgent to their children; and therefore they were punished in them and by them. Is the judgment sickness or lack of health? Then the sin was either the abuse of health, or the non-improvement of health. Is the judgment a famine of the word? Then the sin was slighting and loathing of the word. Is the judgment war? Then the sin was abuse of peace. Is the judgment a blind, carnal, profane, formal, selfish, superstitious clergy? Then the sin has been slighting, neglecting, undervaluing, and despising an able, knowing, zealous, spiritual, and powerful ministry. Is the judgment a worshiping of God in a lazy, dry, dull, dead, formal, customary way, according to the inventions and traditions of men? Then the sin has been men's not worshiping of God in spirit and in truth, and with that zeal, spirit, life, warmth, and fervency as he requires, Joh_4 23-24; Rom_12 11. Is the judgment the breaking of the communion of God's people, and scattering of them into holes and corners, as it was in Ahab's, and Jezebel's, and Gideon's days? Jdg_6 1-5. Then doubtless the sin has been a slighting, undervaluing, neglecting, or forsaking of Christian communion, or else a non-improvement of Christian communion. But,

Answer 5. Fifthly, **Observe whether you have not been very faulty towards others, in the very things which you now suffer yourselves.** Do others wrong you in your names, estates, relations, callings, dealings, etc.? Lay your hands upon your hearts, and ask them whether you have never wronged others, as others now wrong you, Isa_33 1; Rev_13 10; Jas_2 10; Gen_50 15-17. Do others rashly judge you, and bitterly censure you, and falsely accuse you, and unjustly condemn you? If they do, reflect upon your former behavior towards others. And if you must plead guilty, throw the first stone at yourselves, and say with Adonibezek, "As I have done, so God has requited me." Let every lash of God upon you, put you in mind of your deportment towards others, when God has given them gall and wormwood to drink, Mat_7 1-2. But,

Answer 6. Sixthly, **Observe what that sin is—which you cannot endure should be touched, or reproved, or spoken against.** Pro_1 25; Pro_1 30; Pro_12 1; Pro_17 10; Pro_9 8; Pro_15 12. Ah! how proud, how impatient, how passionate, how mad are many—when you come to touch their right-eye sin. When you come to touch them in the tender part, oh! then they fume, and swell, and rage, and carry on like men and women out of their wits; as you may see in the scribes and pharisees, who were so angry and mad with Christ that they sought his death; and all because he was still a-pointing at the toads in their bosoms; namely, pride, vainglory, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. Oh! they could not endure that the sharp razor of reproof should come near their sorest part.

Certainly that Christian must be under a very high distemper, who cannot but smite a righteous man with reproach for smiting him with a reproof. Though gracious reproofs are choice remedy—yet few stomachs can bear them. Most Christians are for lenitives, few are for corrosives. David was glad of a healing reproof—but there are but few Davids alive, Psa_141 5. Who is angry with the physician for prescribing a bitter medicine? And yet, ah! how angry are many Christians when they come to fall under holy reproofs, especially if there is any of that sharpness and cuttingness in them, which the apostle exhorts to in that Tit_1 13. Now, doubtless, the voice of the rod is this, 'Soul! take heed of that sin which you cannot endure should be touched. Labor mightily with God to get that particular sin mortified, which you cannot endure should be reproved." But,

Answer 7. Seventhly, **Observe what sin that is—which most hinders you from living upon precious promises**, and from improving of precious promises, and from treasuring up of precious promises, and from appropriating of precious promises to your own soul, Psa_50 16-17. And it is very probable that, for the subduing of that particular sin, the Lord has visited you with his fatherly rod. But,

Answer 8. Eighthly, **Observe what sin that is—which did most sting and terrify you in an evil day, as when you past been under some loathsome disease or tormenting pain**, Gen_42 21; be it stone, gout, or burning fever, or when you have been in some imminent danger, or when you have had a sentence of death upon you, and there has been but a short step between you and eternity. Doubtless that sin, which has lain as a heavy load upon your conscience in the days of your former distress—that is the sin which God would have conquered and brought under by his present rod. But,

Answer 9. Ninthly, **Observe what particular sin is—which does most hinder you in holy duties and services, and which does most interrupt you in your communion with God.** Inquire what particular sin that is, which your heart is most apt to run after, when you are on the mount of holy duties, Eze_33 31. While the disciples were healing diseases and casting out demons, *the proud white devil* was a-stirring in their own souls, as is evident by that gentle rebuke which our Savior gives them in Luk_10 20, "Don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you." There is no pious duty which a Christian performs—but one white devil or another—one lust or another—will be still dogging and following of him to that duty. There is no public duty, there is no family duty, there is no private duty which a Christian performs—but either that white devil pride, or that white devil hypocrisy, or that white devil vainglory, or else some one or another white devil will follow the soul, near at heel to it. Now, mark what that particular sin is that most haunts your soul when you are in pious duties and services; and it perhaps that is the very sin which God would have subdued by the rod. But,

Answer 10. Tenthly, **Observe what sin that is—which the rest of your corruptions are most serviceable to, and which they most attend upon.** Mark what sin that is, which all other sins do most bow the knee to. Mark that sin which has a commanding power over all other sins; which says to one 'Go' and he goes, and to another 'Come' and he comes. Mark what sin that is, which is still uppermost, and which all other sins do most serve. You know when a man has a great wound in his body, all the ill humours will run there. Observe what sin that is, which all the ill humours of the soul do most run after; for it is very likely that that is the very sin that God would have brought under by the rod. But, Answer 11. Eleventhly, **Observe what that sin is—which your hearts are most apt to hide and cloak, and cover over with the most specious and fair pretenses.** Saul had a covetous desire, and he covers it over with the fair pretenses that *the people* would have it so; and that what was spared, was for *sacrifice* to God, 1Sa_15 20-21. *Caesar's favor* was the great darling in Pilate's eyes—but he covers all over with washing his hands, Mat_27 24. The scribes and pharisees were exceeding covetous—but their long prayers, as a cloak, must cover all, Matthew 23. Judas also was a man of the same mind and mettle with them "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and kept the money bag, and stole what was put therein. Mat_26 8-9; Joh_12 5-6. Judas, as Tertullian thinks, was pretty honest until he carried the bag; but no sooner was he in office—but he puts conscience out of office—but all must be covered over with a cloak of charity. Observe what sin that is, which you are most apt to cast *the silk or the satin mantle* over; and it is ten to one but that is the sin that God would have brought under by the rod. But,

Answer 12. Twelfthly and lastly, **Observe what that sin is—which you are most easily overcome by.** Samson was easily overcome by Delilah; when all the world besides could make no conquest upon him. The apostle bids us "lay aside the sin that does so easily besets us," Heb_12 1. There are some sins that find more easy approaches to us, and more easy acceptance with us, and accordingly they do more easily captivate us. Observe what that sin is, which you do most readily and easily open the door to; and doubtless that is the sin that God would have mortified and subdued by the rod.

(2.) The second lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—**deeply to judge yourselves and greatly to humble your souls, for those particular sins which have brought the rod upon you**. Thus David did in that 2Sa_24 10; 2Sa_24 17. When you have found out the Achan which has brought the rod upon you, *stone him to death!* and lie humble and low under the rod, and then the Almighty will be graciously pacified and sweetly reconciled unto you.

(3.) The third lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **view the rod on every side**. If there are briars on one side of the rod, there is rosemary on the other side of the rod; if there be wormwood and gall at one end of the rod, there is sweet honey at the other end of the rod—as there was at the top of Jonathan's rod, 1Sa_14 43.

If we should come into a painter's shop, and see a picture half drawn, it might trouble us and startle us, if it did not fright us and amaze us; but yet, when the picture is perfected, completed, and finished—it may prove a very beauteous, lovely, breath-taking piece. The application is easy. Look! as every judgment, every affliction, every rod, has its black, dark side; so every judgment, every affliction, has its bright side too. Now, it is the wisdom of a Christian to look on the bright side of the rod, as well as it is his work to look on the dark side of the rod. When a Christian looks upon the dark side of the cloud, he should be humbled and abased; but when he looks upon the bright side of the cloud, he should be comforted and cheered, Jas_5 11. He who is still a-looking on the briary side of the rod, will be very apt to fret and faint under the rod; but he who looks on the rosemary side of the rod, as well as the briary side of the rod—he will bear up patiently, gallantly, and cheerfully under the rod. The voice of the rod is, "Look on both sides, look on both sides!" But,

(4.) The fourth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **look on the rod in conjunction with the HAND which holds it.** Thus Hezekiah did, 2Ki_20 16-19; thus Aaron did, Lev_10 1-3; thus Eli did, 1Sa_3 11-19; thus David did, Psa_39 9; thus Job did, Job_1 20-22; yes, and thus Jesus did, Joh_18 11, "Shall I not drink the cup that **my Father** has given me to drink?" Though the cup was a bitter cup, a bloody cup—yet seeing it was put into his hand by his Father, he drinks it off, with a "Father, I thank you." The rod in itself brings nothing but pain to the child; but the rod in the hand of a Father brings nothing but love, kindness, and sweetness. Rev_3 19, "Whom he loves, he chastens." You should never look upon the rod of affliction, but as it is in the hand of your heavenly Father, and then you will kiss it, rather than murmur under it! But,

(5.) The fifth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is to **cleave and cling close to God under the rod**. Oh how does the child cling and hang upon his father when he takes up the rod. Let such a child-like spirit be found in you, when the Father of spirits takes up the rod. When the rod was upon David's back, oh how does he cleave to God, even as the wife cleaves to her husband; "My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me." Psa_63 8. So when Job was under the rod, oh how does he cling about God! Job_13 15, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him." Job will hang upon a killing God; so the church in that Psa_80 15-18, etc.; so those hundred forty and four thousand who had their fathers' names written in their foreheads, Rev_14 1-6. O friends! you never show so much child-like love, nor so much child-like sincerity, nor so much child-like integrity—as you show when, under the smarting rod, you are found clinging close to the Lord, and hanging upon the Lord by an exercise of grace.

When Antisthenes held up his staff, as if he intended to beat one of his scholars out of his school, the scholar told him "that he might strike him if he pleased—but he would never find a staff of so hard wood as should ever be able to beat him away." When no staff, no rod, no affliction, can drive us from Christ—it is a sure argument that we have profited much in the school of Christ. But,

(6.) The sixth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **PREPARE to meet the Lord while the rod is in his hand** Amo_4 12, "Therefore thus will I do unto you, O Israel and because I will do this unto you—prepare to meet your God, O Israel." Now there is a TWOFOLD PREPARATION.

[1.] The first is a **negative** preparation and this lies in taking heed of sinning against light and conscience; for those sins which are against a clear light and an awakened conscience, are most wounding, devastating, terrifying, and damning.

[2.] Secondly, There is a **positive** preparation and that consists in repentance and returning to the Lord, and in abasing and humbling yourselves before the Almighty, 2Ch_7 14. As there is no running from God, so there is no contending with God; for what is the chaff to the whirlwind, or the stubble to a consuming fire? and therefore the voice of the rod is, "Prepare to meet the Lord in a way of faith and repentance; prepare to meet the Lord in an exercise of grace; prepare to meet the Lord with prayers, and tears, and strong cries." But,

(7.) The seventh lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **acknowledge God's sovereign power and authority over the rod—to break it, or burn it, or take it off, or lay it on--as He pleases.**, Mic_6 13, Deu_28 58-61. "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand." Deu_32 39. All diseases and sicknesses are under the command of God; they are all his sergeants, his servants, to execute his pleasure.

"When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." Mat_8 5-10. But wherein did the greatness of the centurion's faith appear? Why, in this very acknowledgment, that all diseases were to Christ as servants, and that they were as much under the command of Jesus Christ, as any servant is under the command of his master. When Christ bids diseases—'go and afflict such a man,' they go; 'go and torment such a man,' they go; 'go and kill such a man,' they go. When He calls them off--they come off at His call. Dear friends, it is a very great point of faith to believe these five things.

[1.] First, That **God is the author of all the diseases, maladies, and sicknesses that are in the world; and that he sets them on and calls them off at his own good will and pleasure** Amo_3 6, "When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?" He speaks of the evil of punishment, and not of the evil of sin. It was a mad principle among the Manichees, who referred all calamities to the devil for their author, as if there could be evil in the city, and the Lord have no hand in it.

[2.] Secondly, It is a great point of faith to believe that **all diseases and sicknesses are limited by God, in respect of PLACES**. God sent diseases of all sorts into Egypt—but he forbade them Goshen, Exo_8 20-23; Exo_9 23-26. Ponder seriously upon these scriptures. God's shooting his arrows into one town and not into another, into one city and not into another, into one kingdom and not into another, into one family and not into another—does sufficiently evidence that all diseases and sicknesses are limited by the Holy One of Israel in respect of places.

[3.] Thirdly, It is a very great point of faith to believe that **all sicknesses and diseases are limited by God in respect of PERSONS**. That they are so, is evident in that Psa_91 3-8; Isa_65 12. But who lives in the faith of this truth? Sometimes in the same house one is infected, and the other is not; sometimes in the same bed the one is smitten, and the other is not; sometimes at the same table the one is taken away, and the other is left, etc.; and this does Soundly evidence and witness that all sicknesses and diseases are limited by God in respect of persons as well as in respect of places. But,

[4.] Fourthly, It is a great point of faith to believe that **all diseases and sicknesses are limited by God in respect of the DEGREES to which they shall arise**. That God that sets bounds to the raging sea, and that says unto it, "Thus far shall you go, and no farther," that God sets bounds to all raging diseases and sicknesses, and says unto them, Thus far you shall go, and no farther. He sets bounds to the **fever**; he says to it, Go and scorch and burn up such a body so much, and no more; and to the **disease**, Go and devastate such a body so much, and no more; and to the raging **pestilence**, Go and weaken such a body so much, and no more; and to the **stone**, Go and torment such a body so much, and no more. But,

[5.] Fifthly, It is a very great point of faith to believe that **all diseases and sicknesses are limited by God as to their CONTINUANCE**. God says to one disease, Go, hang upon such a man so *many years*; to another, Go, hang upon such a man but *a few years*; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but *a year*; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but *a few months*; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but *a few weeks*; and to another, go, hang upon such a man but *a few days*; and to another, go, hang upon such a man but *a few hours*, etc. And accordingly it comes to pass. But,

(8.) The eighth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **get more weaned and more mortified affections to all worldly comforts, contentments, and enjoyments**. [Gal_5 24; 1Co_7 29-40; Ecc_1 2; Pro_23 5; Jer_45 4-5] A man never comes to experience so much of the emptiness, the nothingness, the uselessness, the vanity, the mutability, the impotency, the insufficiency, and the uncertainty of all worldly comforts and enjoyments—as when he comes to fall under the rod. The constant cry of the rod is, "Be dead to the profits, pleasures, honors, and applauses of the world; be dead to relations, be dead to friends, be dead to everything below a living Jesus!" But,

(9.) The ninth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence is—to **get assurance of greater and better things than any this world does afford**, Heb_10 33-34. That saying is as true as it is old, namely, that the assurance of an eternal life is the life of this temporal life. But having spoke so much of this particular in my treatise on assurance, which is now in your hands, I shall satisfy myself with this hint at present. But,

(10.) The tenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—**not to despise the rod**. Heb_12 5, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord." The Greek word which is translated *despise*, signifies *the littling of a thing*. Oh! do not little the rod, do not lessen it, do not slight it, do not make a tush at it, do not set light by it, do not say, 'I will not regard it!' He who does, shows himself more of Stoic, than a Christian. Now, because there is such a desperate aptness and proneness in many to make light of the rod, it will be your wisdom **seriously to lay to heart these four particulars**

[1.] First, That **it is the DIRECT hand of God**, Amo_3 6; Deu_28 58-61, and therefore not to be despised. It is a sad and sinful thing to despise the indirect hand of God; but it is more sad and sinful to despise the direct hand of God. But,

[2.] Secondly, **It is a MIGHTY hand of God** 1Pe_5 6, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Certainly that heart must be mightily wicked, which dares despise the mighty hand of God, Amo_4 10; Ezra 38 22-23.

[3.] Thirdly, **It is an ANGRY hand of God**, and therefore do not despise it Psa_90 7, "For we are consumed by your anger, and by your wrath are we troubled." Psa_90 11, "Who knows the power of your anger? even according to your fear, so is your wrath." Shall devils tremble under his angry hand? yes, shall they roar as the sea under his wrathful hand, (as the Greek word signifies in Jas_2 19,) and will you presume to despise his angry hand? The Lord forbid, Num_16 46; Ezra 33 27-29; Deu_29 22-25. But,

[4.] Fourthly and lastly, Consider that **it is a HOLY hand, it is a JUST and RIGHTEOUS hand, it is a FAITHFUL hand of God**; and therefore do not despise it; Jer_29 17-19; Lev_26 25; Jer_14 12-16; Psa_119 75, "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, or righteousness, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me." Psa_119 137, "Righteous are you, O Lord, and upright are your judgments." Certainly none but unholy people will be so impudent as to despise God's holy hand. Well,

(11.) The eleventh lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is— **not to be discouraged under the rod**, Jer_27 13; 2Sa_24 10; 2Sa_24 17; Heb_12 5, "Nor faint when you are rebuked of him."

First, It is a rod in a Father's hand; and therefore do not faint under it.

Secondly, God will do much good by the rod, and therefore do not faint under the rod.

Thirdly, You could not have been without the rod; and therefore do not faint under the rod.

Fourthly, The rod which is now upon you, is not according to the greatness of God's **anger**, nor according to the greatness of his **power**, nor according to the strictness of his **justice**, nor according to the demerits of your **sins**, nor according to the malicious desires of **Satan**, nor according to the designs, plots, and contrivances of wicked and unreasonable men, nor according to the extensiveness of your **fears**—for you have feared worse things than you feel—nor according to that sharp rod which has been upon the primitive saints, nor according to that sharp rod which many thousands of the precious sons and daughters of Zion are under in other parts of the world. Therefore do not faint under the rod, do not be discouraged under the rod.

Fifthly, by fainting under the rod, you will gratify Satan, reproach religion, render yourselves unserviceable, and make work for future repentance; and therefore do not faint under the rod. But,

(12.) The twelfth lesson that you are to learn under the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—**humbly to kiss the rod, and patiently and quietly to lie under the rod, until the Lord shall either give you a gracious, or a glorious, deliverance from it.** [2Ch_32 25-26; Lev_26 40-42; Mic_7 9; Lam_3 30] What is the rod, and what is the raging pestilence, compared to the horrors of conscience, and to the flames of hell, or to an everlasting separation from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power? 2Th_1 8-9. And therefore put your mouths in the dust, and be silent before the Lord. He who has deserved a hanging, if he escapes with a whipping, has no cause to murmur or complain. We who have deserved a damning—have little cause to murmur or complain of a whipping, yes, though it should be with a pestilential rod. But,

(13.) The thirteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—**highly, fully, freely, and signally to justify the Lord, and to think well of the Lord, and to speak well of the Lord under the rod**. To that purpose, consult these scriptures, Psa_119 75; Psa_119 137; Neh_9 33; Ezr_9 13; Lam_1 3; Lam_1 5; Lam_1 7-8; Lam_1 10; Lam_4 15; Lam_4 18; Dan_9 12; Dan_9 14; 2Ki_20 16-19; Jer_12 1-2; Psa_119 17-22; Psa_22 1-3; Psa_97 2. But,

(14.) The fourteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—**personal reformation**. When the rod smarts, and the pestilence rages—God expects that every man should smite upon his thigh, and turn from the evil of his doings. 2Ch_7 13-14, "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land;" that is, "I will remove the judgments that are upon the land, and I will confer upon my reforming people all those favors and blessings that they stand in need of." Consult these scriptures, Ezr_10 14; Ezr_10 19; 2Ch_30 8-9; and 2Ch_29 8; 2Ch_29 10; 2Ch_29 15-16. But,

(15.) The fifteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **make God your habitation, your shelter, your refuge**. Ponder seriously upon those scriptures, Psa_91 2; Psa_91 9-10; Psa_90 1; Psa_71 3; Psa_57 1. They dwell most safely, most securely, most nobly, who dwell in God, who live under the shadow of the Almighty, and who every day lodge their souls in the bosom of eternal loves. But,

(16.) The sixteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or the raging pestilence, is—to **set up God as the great object of your fear** Psa_119 119-120; Isa_8 7-8; Isa_8 13-14, compared. When the judgments of God are either threatened or executed, feared or felt—it highly concerns us to lift up God as the main object of our fear. **We should fear that hand which lays on the rod—more than the rod itself!** Job_13 11; Jer_36 24. When God takes up the rod, when he draws his sword, and when he shoots his pestilential arrows among us—oh how highly does it concern us to fear before him with a child-like fear, with a reverential fear, with a fear which fortifies the heart against sin, and with a fear which fits the soul for duty, and which draws, yes, drives the soul to duty. But.

(17.) The seventeenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **expect God's singular presence with you, and his admirable protection over you**. Consult these scriptures, Isa_43 2; Dan_3 24-25; Gen 39 39-40; Psa_23 4-5; Psalms 91; Isa_63 9; Isa_26 20-21; Eze_9 4; Eze_9 6. God is above his people and beneath them, Deu_33 25-27. He is under them and over them, Son_2 6. He is before them and behind them, Isa_52 12, and Isa_58 8. He is on the right hand of his people, and he is on the left hand of his people, Psa_16 8; Psa_121 5; Psa_118 15-16; Exo_14 22; Exo_14 29. God is round about his people, Psa_34 7; Psa_125 2. And God is in the midst of his people, Zec_2 5; Psa_46 5; Psa_12 6. Oh, the safety, the security of the poor people of God—for God is above his people and beneath them, he is under them and over them, he is before them and behind them, he is in the front and in the rear, and he is round about them and in the midst of them. But,

(18.) The eighteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **live every day in a fresh, choice, and frequent exercise of grace**. Consult these scriptures, Psa_91 2-4; Jer_39 17-18; Mic_7 7-9; Psa_40 1-2; Hab_2 1-4; Jer_30 21. That man who lives daily in an exercise of grace—that man lives every day in heaven on this side heaven, whatever affliction or judgment he is under.

(19.) The nineteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—to **quicken up your hearts to seek the Lord by extraordinary ways and means, namely, by fasting and prayer**. Consult these scriptures, Num_16 46, seq.; Psa_106 23; Psa_106 29-30; Isa_22 2-5; Isa_22 12-13; Jon_3 5, seq.; 2Ch_12 2-7; 1Ki_21 21, seq.; Joe_2 12-17. But,

(20.) The twentieth, and so the last, lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is—**to prepare for death**; it is to be in actual readiness to die. Ah, friends! every ache, every pain, every disease—is one of death's warning pieces. There is not a headache, not a toothache, not a fever, not a grief, not a fall, not a wrench, not a plague-sore—but is a divine warning to man to prepare to die. It is a solemn work to die; and therefore we had need prepare to die. It is a work that is to be done but once; and therefore we had need prepare to do that work well, which is to be done but once.

In this world we hear often, and pray often, and read often, and meditate often, and eat often, and drink often, and that which is worst, we sin often; but we must die but once, Job_14 14; Heb_9 27. Death will try all our graces, and all our experiences, and all our evidences, and all our comforts, and all our attainments, and all our enjoyments; and therefore we had need to prepare to die. Though there is nothing more certain than death—yet there is nothing more uncertain than

(1.) the **time** when we shall die;

(2.) the **place** where we shall die;

(3.) the **manner** how we shall die.

As whether we shall die a sudden death, or a lingering death, or a violent death; or whether we shall fall by the sword abroad, or by famine or pestilence at home; or whether we shall fall by this disease or that illness; and therefore we had need be always in an actual readiness to die. No man shall die the sooner—but much the easier and the better, for preparing to die; and therefore let us always have our loins girt and our lamps burning. **As death leaves us—so judgment will find us!** Therefore we have very great cause to secure our saving interest in Christ, a changed nature, and a pardon in our bosoms, that so we might have nothing to do but to die. Except we prepare to die, all other preparations will do us no good. In a word—death is a change, a great change; it is the last change until the resurrection; it is lasting, yes, an everlasting change; for it puts a man into an eternal condition of happiness or misery; it is a universal change; all people must pass under this flaming sword. That statute law, "Dust you are—and unto dust you shall return," will sooner or later take hold on all mortals, Gen_3 18; and therefore it highly concerns us to prepare for death.

And thus I have shown you these lessons which you are to learn by the rod. The Lord grant that your souls may fall under those fresh, those choice, those full, and those constant influences and communications of his Holy Spirit, as may enable you to take out those twenty lessons that I have laid open before you. I confess the epistle is large—but do but consider your own conditions, and the present dispensations under which we are cast—and then I suppose you will not call it by the name of a tedious epistle.

05 Twenty arguments to persuade you to

Twenty arguments to persuade you to closet prayer

These words of our Savior are plain, and to be taken literally, and not allegorically, for he speaks of 'shutting the door' of the chamber. In this chapter there is a manifest opposition between the Pharisees praying in the synagogues and corners of the streets, and others praying in secret.

In the text you have a positive precept for every Christian to pray alone "But you, when you pray, enter into your closet," etc., as speaking not so much of a joint duty of many praying together, as of a duty which each person is to do alone. The command in the text sends us as well to the closet as to the church; and he is a pious hypocrite, who chooses the one and neglects the other. He who puts on a religious demeanor abroad to gain himself a great name among men, and at the same time lives like an atheist at home, shall at the last be unmasked by God, and presented before all the world for a most detestable hypocrite.

Bellarmine and some others turn the text into an allegory. They say that in these words there are two allegories. First, the chamber door is the sense, "shut the door," that is, say they, your sense, lest vain imaginations and worldly thoughts distract your mind in praying. Secondly, the door, say they, is our mouth, "shut your door," that is, your lips, say they, and let your prayer be like the prayer of Hannah, conceived in your mind—but not uttered with your mouth. It is usual with papists and other monkish men who lie in wait to deceive, to turn the blessed Scriptures into a nose of wax, under pretense of allegories and mysteries. Origen was a great admirer of allegories. By the strength of his mental abilities and wanton wit, he turned most of the Scriptures into allegories; and by the just judgment of God upon him, he foolishly understood and absurdly applied that Mat_19 12 literally, "Some have made themselves chaste for the kingdom of heaven," and so castrated himself. And indeed he might as well have plucked out one of his eyes upon the same account, because Christ says, "It is better to go to heaven with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire," Mat_18 9.

In all ages heretics have commonly defended their heresies by translating of scriptures into allegories. The apostle speaks of such as, denying the resurrection of the body, turn all the testimonies of the resurrection into an allegory, meaning thereby only the spiritual resurrection of the soul from sin, of which sort was Hymenaeus and Philetus, who destroyed the faith of some, saying "the resurrection was past already," 2Ti_2 17-18. And are there not many among us who turn the whole history of the Bible into an allegory, and who turn Christ, and sin, and death, and the soul, and hell, and heaven, and all into an allegory? Many have and many do miserably pervert the Scriptures by turning them into vain and groundless allegories. Some wanton wits have expounded paradise to be the soul, man to be the mind, the woman to be the sense, the serpent to be delight, the tree of knowledge of good and evil to be wisdom, and the rest of the trees to be the virtues and endowments of the mind. O friends! *it is dangerous to bring in allegories where the Scripture does not clearly and plainly warrant them, and to take those words figuratively which should be taken properly.*

The word which in the text is rendered *closet*, has only three most usual significations among Greek authors. First, it may be taken for a secret chamber, or close and locked parlor; secondly, for a safe or cupboard to lay victuals in; thirdly, for a locked chest or cupboard wherein treasure usually is reserved.

The best and most judicious interpreters that I have cast my eye upon, both of a former and later date, do all expound my text of private prayer in retired places; and with them I close; and so the main doctrine that I shall gather from the words is this

Doctrine. That **closet prayer or private prayer is an indispensable duty**, which Christ himself has laid upon all who are not willing to lie under the woeful brand of being hypocrites.

I beseech you seriously to lay to heart these five things

1. First, If any prayer is a duty, then secret prayer must needs be a duty; for secret prayer is as much prayer as any other prayer is prayer; and secret prayer prepares and fits the soul for family prayer, and for public prayer. Secret prayer sweetly inclines and strongly disposes a Christian to all other religious duties and services. But,

2. Secondly, If secret prayer is not an indispensable duty which lies upon you, by what authority does conscience so upbraid you, and so accuse you, and so condemn you, and so terrify you—as it often does for the neglect of this duty? But,

3. Thirdly, Was it ever the way or method of God to promise again and again a reward, an open reward for that work or service which himself never commanded? Surely not. Now, to this duty of secret prayer, the Lord has again and again promised an open reward, Mat_6 6; Mat_6 18. And therefore without question, this is a duty incumbent upon all Christians.

4. Fourthly, Our Savior in the text takes it for granted that every child of God will be frequent in praying to his heavenly Father; and therefore he encourages them so much the more in the work of secret prayer. "When you pray;" as if he had said, I know you can as well hear without ears, and live without food, and fight without hands, and walk without feet, as you are able to live without prayer. And therefore when you go to wait on God, or to give your heavenly Father a visit, "Enter into your closet, and shut your doors," etc.

5. Fifthly, If closet prayer is not an indispensable duty that Christ has laid upon all his people, why does Satan so much oppose it? why does he so industriously and so unweariedly labor to discourage Christians in it, and to take off Christians from it? Certainly, Satan would never make such a fierce and constant war as he does upon private prayer, were it not a necessary duty, a real duty, and a soul-enriching duty. But more of this you will find in the following discourse; and therefore let this touch suffice for the present, etc.

Now, these five things do very clearly and evidently demonstrate that *secretly and solitarily to hold fellowship with God is the undoubted duty of every Christian*. But for a more full opening and confirmation of this great and important point, I shall lay down **these twenty arguments or considerations to persuade you to closet prayer.**

[1.] First, **The most eminent saints, both in the Old and New Testament, have applied themselves to private prayer.** **Moses** was alone in the mount with God forty days and forty nights, Exo_34 28. So **Abraham** fills his mouth with arguments, and reasons the case out alone with God in prayer, to prevent Sodom's desolation and destruction, and never leaves off pleading and praying until he had brought God down from fifty to ten, Gen_18 22-32; and in Gen_21 33, you have Abraham again at his private prayers "And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." Why did Abraham plant a grove—but that he might have a most private place to pray and pour out his soul before the Lord in?

So **Isaac** Gen_24 63, "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide." The Hebrew word that is here rendered *meditate*, signifies to pray as well as to meditate, and so it is often used. It is a comprehensive word, that takes in both prayer and meditation. So you shall find **Jacob** at his private prayer Gen_32 24-28, "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." When Jacob was all alone, and in a dark night, and when his joints were out of joint, he so wrestles and weeps, and weeps and wrestles in private prayer, that as a prince at last he prevails with God, Hos_12 3-4. So **David**, Psa_55 16-17, "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice."

So **Daniel** was three times a day in private prayer Dan_6 10, "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." Daniel had accustomed himself to private prayer; he went to his closet before he went to his public employment and state affairs; and at his return to dinner, he turned first into his chamber to serve his God and refresh his soul before he sat down to feast his body; and at the end of the day, when be had dispatched his business with men, he made it his business to wait upon God in his chamber. So **Jonah** keeps up private prayer when he was in the fish's belly, yes, when he was in the belly of hell, Jon_2 1-2, etc. So we have **Elijah** at prayer under the juniper tree, 1Ki_19 4; so **Hannah**, 1Sa_1 13. Now, Hannah she speaks in her heart; only her lips moved—but her voice was not heard. **The very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of the soul before God**, as Hannah did, 1Sa_1 15. Neither was **Rebekah** a stranger to this duty, who, upon the babe's struggling in her womb, went to inquire of the Lord, Gen_25 22; that is, she went to some secret place to pray, says Calvin, Musculus, Mercerus, and others.

So **Saul** is no sooner converted—but presently he falls upon private prayer Act_9 11, "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for, behold, he prays." Though he was a strict Pharisee—yet he never prayed to purpose before, nor never prayed in private before. The Pharisees used to pray in the corners of the streets, and not in the corners of their houses. And after his conversion he was frequently in private prayer, as you may see by comparing of these scriptures together, Rom_1 9; Eph_1 15-16; Php_1 3-4; 2Ti_1 3. So **Epaphras** was a warm man in closet prayer, Php_4 12-13; so **Cornelius** had devoted himself to private prayer, Act_10 2; Act_10 4; and so **Peter** gets up to the housetop to pray Act_10 9, "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew near unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour." Peter got up upon the housetop, not only to avoid distraction—but that he might be the more secret in his private devotion.

Eusebius tells us of James called Justus, that his knees were grown hard and brawny with kneeling so much in private prayer. And Nazianzen reports of his sister Gorgonia, that her knees seemed to cleave to the earth by her often praying in private. And Gregory with of his aunt Trucilla, that her elbows became hard by often leaning upon her desk at private prayer. I have read of a devout person, who, when the set time for his private devotion was come, whatever company he was in, he would break from them with this neat and handsome come off, "I have a friend that waits for me; farewell." And there was once a great lady of this land, who would frequently withdraw from the company of lords and ladies of great nobility, who came to visit her, rather than she would lose her set times of waiting upon God in her closet; she would, as they called it, rudely take her leave of them, that so she might in private attend the Lord of lords. She would spare what time she could to express her favors, civilities, and courtesies among her relations and friends; but she would never allow them to rob God of his time, nor her soul of that comfort and communion which she used to enjoy when she was with God in her closet.

Indeed, **one hour's communion with God in one's closet, is to be preferred before the greatest and best company in the world**. And there was a child of a Christian gentlewoman, that was so given to prayer from its infancy, that before it could well speak, it would use to get alone and go to prayer; and as it grew, it was more frequent in prayer and retiring of itself from company; and he would ask his mother very strange questions, far above the capacity of one of his years; but at last, when this child was but five years old, and whipping of his top, on a sudden he flung away his top, and ran to his mother, and with great joy said unto her, "Mother, I must go to God; will you go with me?" She answered, "My dear child, how do you know you shall go to God?" He answered, "God has told me so, for I love God, and God loves me." She answered, "Dear child, I must go when God pleases. But why will you not stay with me?" The child answered, "I will not stay; I must go to God." And the child did not live above a month after—but never cared for play anymore; but falling sick, he would always be saying that he must go to God, he must go to God; and thus sometimes "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise," Mat_21 16. Certainly such people will be ripe for heaven early who begin early to seek God in a closet, in a corner.

And Eusebius reports of Constantine the emperor, that every day he used to shut up himself in some secret place in his palace, and there, on bended knees, did make his devout prayers and soliloquies to God. "My God and I are good company," said famous Dr Sibbes. **A man whose soul is conversant with God in a closet, in a hole, behind the door, or in a desert, a den, a dungeon, shall find more real pleasure, more choice delight, and more full contentment, than in the palace of a prince.** By all these famous instances, you see that the people of God in all ages have addicted themselves to private prayer. O friends these pious examples should be very awakening, very convincing, and very encouraging to you. Certainly it is as much your duty as it is your glory, to follow these pious patterns which are now set before you.

Witness these following scriptures Pro_2 20, "That you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous;" 1Co_11 1, "Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ; Php_3 17, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark those who walk so, as you have us for an example;" Php_4 9, "Those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you;" 1Th_1 6, "And you became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction;" Heb_6 12, "That you be not slothful—but followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." So 2Ti_3 10-12; 2Ti_3 14; Tit_2 7.

It was an excellent law that the Ephesians made, namely, that men should propound to themselves the best patterns, and ever bear in mind some eminent man. Bad men are wonderful in love with bad examples, Jer_44 16-17. The Indian, hearing that his ancestors were gone to hell, said that then he would go there too. Some men have a mind to go to hell for company's sake. Oh that we were as much in love with the examples of good men as others are in love with the examples of bad men; and then we would be oftener in our closets than now we are! Oh that our eyes were more fixed on the pious examples of all that have in them 'anything of Christ,' as Bucer spoke! Shall we love to look upon the pictures of our friends; and shall we not love to look upon the pious examples of those who are the lively and lovely picture of Christ? The pious examples of others should be the looking-glasses by which we should dress ourselves. He is the best and wisest Christian, who writes after the fairest Scripture copy, that imitates those Christians that are most eminent in grace, and that have been most exercised in closet prayer, and in the most secret duties of religion.

Jerome having read the life and death of Hilarion, one who lived most Christianly, and died most comfortably, folded up the book, saying, Well, Hilarion shall be the champion that I will follow; his good life shall be my example, and his godly death my precedent. It is brave to live and die by the examples of the most eminent saints. But,

[2.] Secondly. **Consider, when Christ was on earth, he did much exercise himself in secret prayer**; he was often with God alone, as you may see in these famous scriptures Mat_14 23, "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone." Christ's choosing solitudes for private prayer, does not only hint to us the danger of distraction and deviation of thoughts in prayer—but how necessary it is for us to choose the most convenient places we can for private prayers. Our own fickleness and Satan's restlessness calls upon us to get into such corners, where we may most freely pour out our souls into the bosom of God Mar_1 35, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." **As the morning time is the fittest time for prayer, so solitary places are the fittest places for prayer** Mar_6 46, "And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray." He who would pray to purpose, had need be quiet when he is alone Luk_5 16, "And he withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed." (Greek, He was departing and praying) to give us to understand that he did thus often. When Christ was neither exercised in teaching nor in working of miracles, he was then very intent on private prayer Luk_6 12, "And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." Did Christ spend whole nights in private prayer to save our souls; and shall we think it much to spend an hour or two in the day for the furtherance of the internal and eternal welfare of our souls?

Luk_21 37, "And in the daytime he was teaching in the temple, and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives." Christ frequently joins praying and preaching together, and that which Christ has joined together, let no man presume to put asunder Luk_22 39; Luk_22 41; Luk_22 44-45, "And he came out, and went as he was accustomed to the mount of Olives, and his disciples also followed him. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood" (clotted or congealed blood) "falling down to the ground" (never was garden watered before or since with blood as this was). "And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow." Ah! what sad pieces of vanity are the best of men in an hour of trial and temptation! These very men, who a little before did stoutly profess and promise that they would never leave him nor forsake him, and that they would go to prison for Christ, and die for Christ—yet when the day of trial came, they could not so much as watch with him one hour; they had neither eyes to see, nor hands to wipe off Christ's bloody sweat; so Joh_6 15-17. Thus you see, by all these famous instances, that Christ was frequent in private prayer.

Oh that we would daily propound to ourselves this noble pattern for our imitation, and make it our business, our work, our heaven, to write after this blessed copy that Christ has set us, namely, to be much with God alone. Certainly Christianity is nothing else but an imitation of the divine nature, a reducing of a man's self to the image of God, in which he was created "in righteousness and true holiness." **A Christian's whole life should be nothing but a visible representation of Christ.** The heathens had this notion among them, as Lactantius reports, that the way to honor their gods was to be like them. Sure I am that the highest way of honoring Christ is to be like to Christ 1Jn_2 6, "He who says he abides in him, ought himself also to walk even as he walked." 1Pe_2 21, "Leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps." Oh that this blessed Scripture might always lie warm upon our hearts. Christ is the sun, and all the watches of our lives should be set by the dial of his motion. Christ is a pattern of patterns; his example should be to us instead of a thousand examples. It is not only our liberty—but our duty and glory, to follow Christ inviolably in all his moral virtues. Other patterns be imperfect and defective—but Christ is a perfect pattern; and of all his children, they are the happiest, who come nearest to this perfect pattern.

Heliogabalus loved his children the better for resembling him in sin. But Christ loves his children the more for resembling him in sanctity. I have read of some springs that change the color of the cattle that drink of them into the color of their own waters. Certainly, Jesus Christ is such a fountain, in which whoever bathes, and of which whoever drinks, shall be changed into the same likeness, 2Co_3 18.

Question. But **why was our Lord Jesus so much in private prayer? Why was he so often with God alone?**

Answer 1. First, **It was to put a very high honor and value upon private prayer**; it was to enhance and raise the price of this duty. Men naturally are very apt and prone to have low and undervaluing thoughts of secret prayer. But Christ, by exercising himself so frequently in it, has put an everlasting honor and an inestimable value upon it. But,

Answer 2. Secondly, He was much in private prayer, he was often with God alone, **that he might not be seen of men, and that he might avoid all shows and appearances of ostentation and popular applause**. He who has commanded us to abstain from all appearances of evil, 1Th_5 22, would not himself, when he was in this world, venture upon the least appearance of evil. Christ was very shy of everything that did but look like sin; he was very shy of the very show and shadow of pride or vainglory.

Answer 3. Thirdly, **To avoid interruptions in the duty**. Secrecy is no small advantage to the serious and lively carrying on of a private duty. Interruptions and disturbances from without are oftentimes quenching to private prayer. The best Christians do but bungle when they meet with interruptions in their private devotions.

Answer 4. Fourthly, **To set us such a blessed pattern and gracious example**, that we should never please nor content ourselves with public prayers only, nor with family prayers only—but that we should also apply ourselves to secret prayer, to closet prayer. Christ was not always in public, nor always in his family—but he was often in private with God alone, that by his own example he might encourage us to be often with God in secret; and happy are those who tread in his steps, and that write after his copy.

Answer 5. Fifthly, That he might approve himself to our understandings and consciences **to be a most just and faithful High Priest**, Heb_2 17; John 17. Christ was wonderful faithful and careful in both parts of his priestly office, namely, redemption and intercession; he was his people's only spokesman. Ah! how earnest, how frequent was he in pouring out prayers, and tears, and sighs, and groans for his people in secret, when he was in this world, Heb_5 7. And now he is in heaven, be is still a-making intercession for them, Heb_7 25.

Answer 6. Sixthly, To convince us that his **Father hears and observes our private prayers**, and bottles up all our secret tears, and that he is not a stranger to our closet desires, wrestlings, breathings, hungerings, and thirstings.

[3.] Thirdly, **Consider that the ordinary exercising of yourselves in secret prayer, is that which will distinguish you from hypocrites**, who do all they do to be seen of men Mat_6 1-2, "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." SELF is the only oil which makes the chariot-wheels of the hypocrite move in all religious concernments. Mat_6 5, "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Mat_6 16, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Thus you see that these hypocrites look more at men than at God in all their duties. When they give alms, the trumpet must sound; when they pray, it must be in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets; and when they fasted, they disfigured their faces that they might appear unto men to fast. **Hypocrites live upon the praises and applauses of men.**

Naturalists report of the Chelydonian stone, that it will retain its virtue no longer than it is enclosed in gold. So hypocrites will keep up their duties no longer than they are fed, and encouraged, and enclosed with the golden praises and applauses of men. Hypocrites are like blazing stars, which, so long as they are fed with vapors, shine as if they were fixed stars; but let the vapors dry up, and presently they vanish and disappear.

Closet duty speaks out most sincerity. He prays with a witness, who prays without a witness. **The more sincere the soul is, the more in closet duty the soul will be**, Job_31 33. Where do you read in all the Scripture, that Pharaoh, or Saul, or Judas, or Demas, or Simon Magus, or the scribes and pharisees, were accustomed to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret? Secret prayer is not the hypocrite's ordinary walk, his ordinary work or trade. There is great cause to fear that his heart was never right with God, whose whole devotion is spent among men, or among many; or else our Savior, in drawing the hypocrite's picture, would never have made this to be the very cast of his countenance, as he does in Mat_6 5. It is very observable, that Christ commands his disciples, that they should not be as the hypocrites. It is one thing to be hypocrites, and it is another thing to be *as* the hypocrites. Christ would not have his people to look like hypocrites, nor to be like to hypocrites. It is only sincerity that will enable a man to make a practice of private prayer. In praying with many, there are many things that may bribe and provoke a carnal heart—as pride, vainglory, love of applause, or to get a name. An hypocrite, in all his duties, trades more for a good name than for a good life, for a good report than for a good conscience; like fiddlers, who are more careful in tuning their instruments, than in composing their lives. But in private prayer there is no such trade to be driven. But,

[4.] Fourthly, Consider that **in secret we may more freely, and fully, and safely unbosom our souls to God than we can in the presence of others**. Hence the husband is to mourn apart, and the wife apart, Zec_12 12-14, not only to show the soundness of their sorrow—but also to show their sincerity by their secrecy. They must mourn apart, that their sins may not be disclosed nor discovered one to another. Here they are severed to show that they wept not for company's sake—but for their own particular sins, by which they had pierced and crucified the Lord of glory. In secret, a Christian may descend into such particulars, as in public or before others he will not, he may not, he ought not, to mention. Ah! how many Christians are there who would blush and be ashamed to walk in the streets, and to converse with sinners or saints, should but those infirmities, enormities, and wickednesses be written in their foreheads, or known to others, which they freely and fully lay open to God in secret. There are many sins which many men have fallen into before conversion and since conversion, which, should they be known to the world, would make themselves to stench, and religion to stench, and their profession to stench in the nostrils of all who know them. Yes, should those weaknesses and wickednesses be published upon the housetops, which many are guilty of before grace received, or since grace received, how would weak Christians be staggered, young corners on in the ways of God discouraged, and many mouths of blasphemy opened, and many sinners' hearts hardened against the Lord, his ways, reproofs, and the things of their own peace; yes, how would Satan's banner be displayed, and his kingdom strengthened, and himself infinitely pleased and delighted! It is an infinite mercy and condescension in God to lay a law of restraint upon Satan, who else would be the greatest blab in all the world. It would be mirth and music to him to be still a-laying open the follies and weaknesses of the saints.

Ambrose brings in the devil boasting against Christ, and challenging Judas as his own. "He is not yours, Lord Jesus, he is mine his thoughts beat for me; he eats with you—but is fed by me; he takes bread from you—but money from me; he drinks with you, and sells your blood to me." There is not a sin that a saint commits—but Satan would trumpet it out to all the world, if God would but give him permission. No man who is in his right wits, will lay open to everyone his bodily infirmities, weaknesses, diseases, ailments, griefs, etc.—but to some near relation, or bosom friend, or able physician. So no man who is in his right wits will lay open to everyone his soul-infirmities, weaknesses, diseases, ailments, griefs, etc.—but to the Lord, or to some particular person who is wise, faithful, and able to contribute something to his soul's relief. Should a Christian but lay open or exposing all his follies and vanities to the world, how sadly would some deride him and scorn him! and how severely and bitterly would others censure him and judge him! etc. When David was alone in the cave, then he poured out his complaint to God, and showed before him his trouble, Psa_142 2. And when Job was all alone, then his eyes poured out tears to God, Job_16 20. There is no hazard, no danger, in exposing of all before God in private—but there may be a great deal of hazard and danger in exposing of all before men.

[5.] Fifthly, **Secret duties shall have open rewards**. [Ecc_12 14; 2Co_5 10; Rev_22 12; Psa_126 5; Luk_14 14; Mat_25 34; Mat_25 37] Mat_6 6, "And your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you openly." So, Mat_6 18, God will reward his people here in part, and hereafter in all perfection. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him in secret. Those who sow in tears secretly, shall reap in joy openly. Private prayer shall be rewarded before men and angels publicly. How openly did God reward Daniel for his secret prayer! Dan_6 10; Dan_6 23-28. Mordecai privately discovered a plot of treason against the person of king Ahasuerus, and he is rewarded openly, Est_2 21-23, with Esther 6. Darius, before he came to the kingdom, received privately a gift from one Syloson; and when he came to be a king, he rewarded him openly with the command of his country Samus. God, in the great day, will recompense his people before all the world, for every secret prayer, and secret tear, and secret sigh, and secret groan that has come from their heart. God, in the great day, will declare to men and angels, how often his people have been in pouring out their souls before him in such and such holes, corners, and secret places; and accordingly he will reward them.

Ah, Christians! did you really believe this, and seriously dwell on this, you would,

(1.) Walk more thankfully.

(2.) Work more cheerfully.

(3.) Suffer more patiently.

(4.) Fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, more courageously.

(5.) Lay out yourselves for God, his interest and glory, more freely.

(6.) Live with whatever providence has cut out for your portion, more quietly and contentedly. And,

(7.) You would be in private prayer more frequently, more abundantly.

[6.] Sixthly, Consider that **God has usually manifested himself most to his people when they have been in secret**, when they have been alone at the throne of grace. Oh the sweet meltings, the heavenly warmings, the blessed cheerings, the glorious manifestations, and the choice communion with God—that Christians have found when they have been alone with God in a corner, in a closet, behind the door!

When did **Daniel** have that vision and comfortable message, that blessed news, by the angel, that he was "greatly beloved"—but when he was all alone at prayer? Dan_9 20-23, "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision." While Daniel was at private prayer, God, by the angel Gabriel, reveals to him the secret of his counsel, concerning the restoration of Jerusalem, and the duration thereof, even to the Messiah; and while Daniel was at private prayer, the Lord appears to him, and in an extraordinary way assures him that he was "a man greatly beloved," or as the Hebrew has it, "a man of desires," that is, a man whom God's desires are towards, a man singularly beloved of God, and highly in favor with God, a man who are very pleasing and delightful to God.

God loves to lade the wings of private prayer with the sweetest, choicest, and chief blessings. Ah! how often has God kissed a poor Christian at the beginning of private prayer, and spoke peace to him in the midst of private prayer, and filled him with light and joy and assurance upon the close of private prayer?

And so **Cornelius** is highly commended and graciously rewarded upon the account of his private prayer Act_10 1-4, "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

Act_10 30-31, "Cornelius answered "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor." Mark, as he was praying in his house, namely, by himself alone, a man in bright clothing—that was an angel in man's shape, Act_10 3—appeared to him, and said, "Cornelius, your prayer is heard." [Act_10 31] He does not mean only that prayer which he made when he fasted and humbled himself before the Lord, Act_10 30-31; but, as Act_10 2-4 show—his prayers which he made alone. For it seems none else were with him then, for he only saw that man in bright clothing; and to him alone the angel addressed his present speech, saying, "Cornelius, your prayers are heard, Act_10 4; Act_10 31. Here you see that Cornelius' private prayers are not only heard—but kindly remembered, and graciously accepted, and gloriously rewarded. Praying Cornelius is not only remembered by God—but he is also visited, sensibly and evidently, by an angel, and assured that his private prayers and good deeds are an odor, a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God.

And so when had **Peter** his vision but when he was praying alone on the housetop? Act_10 9-13, "About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." When Peter was upon the housetop at prayer alone, then he fell into a trance, and he saw heaven opened; and then he had his spirit raised, his mind elevated, and all the faculties of his soul filled with a divine revelation.

And so when **Paul** was at prayer alone, Act_9 12, he saw in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. Paul had not been long at private prayer before it was revealed to him that he was a chosen vessel, and before he was filled with the gifts, graces, and comforts of the Holy Spirit.

And when **John** was alone in the isle of Patmos, "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ"—where he was banished by Domitian, a most cruel emperor—then he had a glorious sight of the Son of man, and then the Lord discovered to him most deep and profound mysteries, both concerning the present and future state of the church, to the end of the world. And when John was weeping, in private prayer doubtless, then the sealed book was opened to him.

So when **Daniel** was at private prayer, God dispatches a heavenly messenger to him, and his errand was to open more clearly and fully the blessed Scripture to him. Some comfortable and encouraging knowledge this holy man of God had attained unto before by his frequent and constant study in the word, and this eggs him on to private prayer, and private prayer sends an angel from heaven to give him a clearer and fuller light. **Private prayer is a golden key to unlock the mysteries of the word unto us.** The knowledge of many choice and blessed truths, are but the returns of private prayer. The word most dwells richly in their hearts who are most in pouring out their hearts before God in their closets.

When Bonaventura, that seraphic doctor, as some call him, was asked by Aquinas from what books and helps he derived such holy and divine expressions and contemplations, he pointed to a crucifix, and said, "Prostrate in prayer at the feet of this image, my soul receives greater light from heaven than from all study and disputation." Though this be a monkish tradition and superstitious fiction—yet some improvement may be made of it. **Certainly that Christian, who in private prayer lies most at the feet of Jesus Christ, he shall understand most of the mind of Christ in the gospel, and he shall have most of heaven and the things of his own peace brought down into his heart.**

There is no service wherein Christians have such a near, familiar, and friendly fellowship with God as in this of private prayer; neither is there any service wherein God does more delight to make known his truth and faithfulness, his grace and goodness, his mercy and bounty, his beauty and glory to poor souls, than this of private prayer. Luther professes, "That he profited more in the knowledge of the Scripture by private prayer in a short space, than he did by study in a longer space," as John by weeping in in seclusion, got the sealed book opened.

Private prayer crowns God with the honor and glory that is due to his name; and God crowns private prayer with a discovery of those blessed weighty truths to his servants, that are a sealed book to others. **Certainly the soul usually enjoys most communion with God in secret.** When a Christian is in a wilderness, which is a very solitary place, then God delights to speak friendly and comfortably to him Hos_2 14, "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak friendly or comfortably to her," or as the Hebrew has it, "I will speak to her heart." When I have her alone, says God, in a solitary wilderness, I will speak such things to her heart, as shall exceedingly cheer her, and comfort her, and even make her heart leap and dance within her.

A husband imparts his mind most freely and fully to his wife when she is alone; and so does Christ to the believing soul. Oh the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret visits, the secret whispers, the secret cheerings, the secret sealings, the secret discoveries, etc., that God gives to his people when alone, when in a hole, when under the stairs, when behind the door, when in a dungeon! When Jeremiah was calling upon God alone in his dark dungeon, he had great and wonderful things showed him that he knew not of, Jer_33 1-3.

Ambrose was accustomed to say, "I am never less alone, than when I am alone; for then I can enjoy the presence of my God most freely, fully, and sweetly, without interruption." And it was a most sweet and divine saying of Bernard, "O saint, know you not," says he, "that your husband Christ is bashful, and will not be intimate in company? Retire yourself therefore by prayer and meditation into your closet or the fields, and there you shall have Christ's embraces."

A gentlewoman being at private prayer and meditation in her parlor, had such sweet, choice, and full enjoyments of God, that she cried out, "Oh that I might always enjoy this sweet communion with God!" etc.

Christ loves to embrace his spouse, not so much in the open street, as in secret; and certainly the gracious soul has never sweeter views of glory, than when it is most out of the view of the world. Wise men give their best, their choicest, and their richest gifts in secret; and so does Christ give his the best of the best, when they are in a corner, when they are all alone. But as for such as cannot spare time to seek God in a closet, to commune with him in secret—they sufficiently manifest that they have little fellowship or friendship with God, whom they so seldom come at.

[7.] Seventhly, **Consider the time of this life is the only time for private prayer.** Heaven will admit of no secret prayer. In heaven there will be no secret **sins** to trouble us, nor no secret **needs** to pinch us, nor no secret **temptations** to betray us, nor no secret **snares** to entangle us, nor no secret **enemies** to supplant us. We had need live much in the practice of that duty here on earth, that we shall never be exercised in after death. Some duties that are incumbent upon us now, as praising of God, admiring of God, exalting and lifting up of God, joying and delighting in God, etc., will be forever incumbent upon us in heaven; but this duty of private prayer, we must take our leave of, when we come to lay our heads in the dust.

[8.] Eighthly, **Consider the great prevalency of secret prayer. Private prayer is the gate of heaven, a key to let us into paradise.** Oh the great things that private prayer has done with God! Psa_31 22. Oh the great mercies that have been obtained by private prayer! Psa_38 8-9. And oh the great threatenings that have been diverted by private prayer! And oh the great judgments that have been removed by private prayer! And oh the great judgments that have been prevented by private prayer!

I have read of a malicious woman who gave herself to the devil, provided that he would do harm to such a neighbor, whom she mortally hated the devil went again and again to do his errand—but at last he returns and tells her, that he could do no devilry to that man, for whenever he came, he found him either reading the Scriptures, or at private prayer.

Private prayers pierces the heavens, and are commonly blessed and loaded with gracious and glorious returns from thence. While Hezekiah was praying and weeping in private, God sent the prophet Isaiah to him, to assure him that his prayer was heard, and that his tears were seen, and that he would add unto his days fifteen years, Isa_38 5. So when Isaac was all alone meditating and praying, and asking God for a good wife in the fields, he meets Rebekah, Gen_24 63-64.

So Jacob Gen_32 24-28, "So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." In this scripture we have an elegant description of a duel fought between the Almighty and Jacob; and in it there are these things most observable

(1.) First, We have the combatants or **duelists**, Jacob and God, who appeared in the shape or appearance of a man. He who is here said to be a man was the Son of God in human shape, as it appears by the whole narration, and by Hos_12 3-5. Now, that this man who wrestled with Jacob was indeed God, and not really man, is most evident by these reasons

[1.] First, Jacob desires a blessing from him, Gen_32 26. Now, it is God's prerogative-royal to bless, and not angels' nor men's. Consequently,

[2.] Secondly, He calls him by the name of God; "you have power with God," Gen_32 28. And says Jacob, "I have seen God face to face," Gen_32 30. Not that he saw the majesty and essence of God for no man can see the essential glory of God and live, Exo_33 20; Exo_33 23; but he saw God more apparently, more manifestly, more gloriously than ever he had done before. Some created shape, some glimpse of glory, Jacob saw, whereby God was pleased for the present to testify his more immediate presence—but not himself.

[3.] Thirdly, The same person who here Jacob wrestles with is he whom Jacob remembers in his benediction as his deliverer from all evil, Gen_48 16. It was that God that appeared to him at Bethel when he fled from the face of his brother, Gen_35 7. Consequently,

[4.] Fourthly, Jacob is reproved for his curious inquiring or asking after the angel's name, Gen_32 29, which is a clear argument or demonstration of his majesty and glory, God being above all notion and name. God is a super-substantial substance—an understanding not to be understood, a word never to be spoken. One being asked what God was, answered, "That he must be God himself, before he could know God fully." We are as well able to comprehend the sea in a cockle-shell, as we are able to comprehend the Almighty. "In searching after God," says Chrysostom, "I am like a man digging in a deep spring I stand here, and the water rises upon me; and I stand there, and still the water rises upon me."

In this conflict you have not one man wrestling with another, nor one man wrestling with a created angel—but a poor, weak, mortal man wrestling with an immortal God; weakness wrestling with strength, and a finite being with an infinite being. Though Jacob was greatly overmatched—yet he wrestles and keeps his hold, and all in the strength of him, with whom he wrestles.

(2.) Secondly, You have the **place** where they combated, and that was beside the ford Jabbok, Gen_32 22. This is the name of a brook or river springing by Rabbah, the metropolis of the Ammonites, and flowing into Jordan beneath the Sea of Galilee, Num_21 24; Deu_2 37; Jdg_11 13; Jdg_11 15; Deu_3 16. Jacob did never enjoy so much of the presence of God, as when he had left the company of men. Oh! the sweet communion that Jacob had with God when he was retired from his family, and was all alone with his God by the ford Jabbok! Certainly Jacob was never less alone than at this time, when he was so alone. **Saints often meet with the best wine and with the strongest cordials—when they are all alone with God.**

(3.) Thirdly, You have the **time** of the combat, and that was the night. At what time of the night this wrestling, this duel began, we nowhere read; but it lasted until break of day, it lasted until Jacob had the better of the angel. How many hours of the night this conflict lasted, no mortal man can tell. God's design was that none should be spectators nor witnesses of this combat but Jacob only; and therefore Jacob must be wrestling when others were sleeping.

(4.) Fourthly, You have the **ground** of the quarrel, and that was Jacob's fear of Esau, and his importunate desire for a blessing. Jacob flies to God, that he might not fall before man; he flies to God, that he might not fly before men. In a storm, there is no shelter like to the wing of God. **He is safest, and happiest, and wisest, who lays himself under divine protection.** This Jacob knew, and therefore he runs to God, as to his only city of refuge. In this conflict God would have given out "Let me go, for the day breaks," Gen_32 26; but Jacob keeps his hold, and tells him boldly to his very face that he would not let him go unless he would bless him. **Oh the power of private prayer!** It has a kind of omnipotency in it; it takes God captive; it holds him as a prisoner; it binds the hands of the Almighty; yes, it will wrench a mercy, a blessing, out of the hand of heaven itself! Oh the power of that prayer which makes a man victorious over the greatest, the highest power! Jacob, though a man, a single man, a traveling man, a tired man, yes, though a worm, which is easily crushed and trodden under foot, and no man, Isa_41 14—yet in private prayer he is so potent, that he overcomes the omnipotent God; he is so mighty, that he overcomes the Almighty!

(5.) Fifthly, You have the nature or **manner** of the combat, and that was both outward and inward, both physical and spiritual. It was as well by the strength of his body as it was by the force of his faith. He wrestled not only with spiritual strugglings, tears, and prayers, Hos_12 4—but with physical also, wherein God assailed him with one hand, and upheld him with the other. In this, conflict, Jacob and the angel of the covenant did really wrestle arm to arm, and shoulder to shoulder, and foot to foot, and used all other sleights and ways as men do, who wrestle one with another. The Hebrew word which is here rendered *wrestled*, signifies the raising of the dust; because they cast dust one upon another, that so they might take more sure hold one of another. Some conclude that Jacob and the angel did tug, and strive, and turn each other, until they sweat again; for so much the word imports. Jacob and the angel did not wrestle in jest—but in good earnest; they wrestled with their might, as it were, for the garland; they strove for victory as for life.

But as this wrestling was physical, so it was spiritual also. Jacob's soul takes hold of God, and Jacob's faith takes hold of God, and Jacob's prayers takes hold of God, and Jacob's tears takes hold of God, Hos_12 4-5. Certainly Jacob's weapons in this warfare were mainly spiritual, and so "mighty through God." There is no overcoming of God but in his own strength. Jacob did more by his royal faith than he did by his noble hands, and more by weeping than he did by sweating, and more by praying than he did by all his bodily strivings.

(6.) Sixthly and lastly, You have the **outcome** of the combat, and that is, victory over the angel, Gen_32 28. Jacob wrestles in the angel's power, and so overcomes him. As a prince, he overpowers the angel by that very power he had from the angel. The angel was as freely and fully willing to be conquered by Jacob, as Jacob was willing to be conqueror. When lovers wrestle, the strongest is willing enough to take a fall of the weakest; and so it was here. The father, in wrestling with his child, is willing enough, for his child's comfort and encouragement, to take a fall now and then; and so it was between the angel and Jacob in the present case. Now in this blessed story, as in a crystal glass, you may see the great power and prevalency of private prayer; it conquers the great conqueror; it is so omnipotent that it overcomes an omnipotent God.

Now this you may see more fully and sweetly cleared up in Hos_12 4, "He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there." When Jacob was all alone and in a dark night, and but on one leg—yet then he played the prince with God, as the Hebrew has it. Jacob by prayers and tears did so prince it with God as that he carried the blessing. Jacob's wrestling was by weeping, and his prevailing by praying. Prayers and tears are not only very pleasing to God—but also very prevalent with God. And thus you see that this great instance of Jacob speaks out aloud the prevalency of private prayer.

See another instance of this in **David** Psa_6 6, "I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears." These are all excessive figurative speeches, to set forth the greatness of his sorrow, and the multitude of his tears. David in his retirement makes the place of his sin, namely, his bed, to be the place of his repentance. David sins privately upon his bed, and David mourns privately upon his bed. Every place which we have polluted by sin, we should sanctify and water with our tears Psa_6 8, "Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping." As blood has a voice, and as the rod has a voice, so tears have a voice. Tears have tongues, and tears can speak. There is no prayer compared to those which secret tears make in the ears of God.

A prudent and indulgent father can better pick out the wants and necessities of his children by their secret tears than by their loud complaints, by their weeping than by their words; and do you think that God can't do as much? Tears are not always mutes Lam_2 18, "Cry aloud," says one, "not with your tongue—but with your eyes; not with, your words—but with your tears; for that is the prayer that makes the most forcible entry into the ears of the great God of heaven." Penitent tears are undeniable ambassadors that never return from the throne of grace without a gracious answer. Tears are a kind of silent prayers, which, though they say nothing—yet they obtain pardon; and though they plead not a man's cause—yet they obtain mercy at the hands of God. As you see in that great instance of Peter, who, though he said nothing that we read of—yet weeping bitterly, he obtained mercy, Mat_26 75.

I have read of Augustine, who, coming as a visitant to the house of a sick man, he saw the room full of friends and kindred, who were all silent—yet all weeping the wife sobbing, the children sighing, the kinsfolk lamenting, all mourning; whereupon Augustine uttered this short prayer, "Lord, what prayer do you hear—if not these?"

Psa_6 9, "The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer." God sometimes answers his people **before** they pray Isa_65 24, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer." And sometimes while they are praying; so it follows in the same verse, "And while they are yet speaking I will hear." So Isa_30 19, "He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry when he shall hear it, he will answer you." And sometimes **after** they have prayed, as the experiences of all Christians can testify. Sometimes God neither hears nor receives a prayer; and this is the common case and lot of the wicked, Pro_1 28; Job_27 9; Isa_1 15. Sometimes God hears the prayers of his people—but does not presently answer them, as in that case of Paul, 2Co_12 7-9; and sometimes God both hears and receives the prayers of his people, as here he did David's. Now in this instance of David, as in a glass, you may run and read the prevalency of private prayer and of secret tears.

You may take another instance of this in **Jonah** "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said 'In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Salvation comes from the Lord." And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land." Jonah 2. When Jonah was all alone, and in the midst of many dangers and deaths, when he was in the whale's belly, yes, in the belly of hell—so called because horrid and hideous, deep and dismal—yet then private prayer fetches him from thence. *Let a man's dangers be ever so many, nor ever so great—yet secret prayer has a certain omnipotency in it that will deliver him out of them all.* In multiplied afflictions, private prayer is most prevalent with God. In the very midst of drowning, secret prayer will keep both head and heart above water. Upon Jonah's private prayer, God sends forth his mandate, and the fish serves Jonah for a ship to sail safe to shore. When the case is even desperate—yet then private prayer can do much with God. Private prayer is of that power that it can open the doors of leviathan, as you see in this great instance, which yet is reckoned as a thing not feasible, Job_41 14.

Another instance of the prevalency of private prayer you have in that 2Ki_4 32-35, "When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them (Privacy is a good help to fervency in prayer) and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes." Oh the power, the prevalency, the omnipotency of private prayer, that raises the dead to life! And the same effect had the private prayer of Elijah in raising the widow's son of Zarephath to life, 1Ki_17 18, et seq.

The great prevalency of **Moses** his private prayers you may read in the following scriptures Num_12 1-2, "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down." Moses by private prayer rules and overrules with God; he was so potent with God in private prayer that he could have what he would from God. So Num_21 7-9; Psa_106 23; Exo_32 9-14; Exo_14 15-17. The same you may see in Nehemiah, Neh_1 11, compared with Neh_2 4-8.

Private prayer, like Saul's sword and Jonathan's bow, when duly qualified as to the person and act, never returns empty; it hits the mark, it carries the day with God; it pierces the walls of heaven, though, like those of Gaza, made of brass and iron, Isa_45 2. Oh, who can express the powerful oratory of private prayer! etc.

[9.] Ninthly, Consider, that **secret duties are the most soul-enriching duties**. Look! as secret meals make fat bodies, so secret duties make fat souls. And as secret trades brings in great earthly riches, so secret prayers makes many rich in spiritual blessings and in heavenly riches. Private prayer is that secret key of heaven that unlocks all the treasures of glory to the soul. The best riches and the sweetest mercies God usually gives to his people when they are in their closets upon their knees. Look! as the warmth the chickens find by close sitting under the hen's wings nourishes them, so are the graces of the saints enlivened, and nourished, and strengthened by the sweet secret influences which their souls fall under when they are in their closet-communion with God. Private prayer conscientiously performed is the secret key of heaven, that has unlocked such treasures and such secrets as has passed the skill of the cunningest devil to find out. Private prayer midwives the choicest mercies and the chief riches in upon us. Certainly there are none so rich in gracious experiences as those who are most exercised in closet duties.

Psa_34 6, "This poor man cried," says David, "and the Lord saved him out of all his troubles." David, pointing to himself, tells us that he "cried," that is, silently and secretly, as Moses did at the Red Sea, and as Nehemiah did in the presence of the king of Persia; "and the Lord saved him out of all his troubles," Exo_14 15; Neh_1 11; and Neh_2 4. And, oh, what additions were these deliverances to his experiences! O my friends, look, as the tender dew that falls in the silent night makes the grass and herbs and flowers to flourish and grow more abundantly than great showers of rain that fall in the day, so secret prayer will more abundantly cause the sweet herbs of grace and holiness to grow and flourish in the soul, than all those more open, public, and visible duties of religion, which too, too often are mingled and mixed with the sun and wind of pride and hypocrisy.

Beloved! you know that many times a favorite at court gets more by one secret motion, by one private request to his prince, than a tradesman or a merchant gets in twenty years' labor and pains, etc. So a Christian many times gets more by one secret motion, by one private request to the King of kings, than many others do by trading long in the more public duties of religion. O sirs! remember that in private prayer we have a far greater advantage as to the exercise of our own gifts and graces and parts, than we have in public; for in public we only hear others exercise their parts and gifts, etc.; in public duties we are more passive—but in private duties we are more active. Now, the more our gifts and parts and graces are exercised, the more they are strengthened and increased. All acts strengthen habits. The more sin is acted, the more it is strengthened. And so it is with our gifts and graces; the more they are acted, the more they are strengthened. But,

[10.] Tenthly, **Take many things together.** All Christians have their secret **sins**. Psa_19 12, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse me from secret faults." Secret not only from other men—but from himself; even such secret sins as grew from errors which he understood not. It is but natural for every man to err, and then to be ignorant of his errors. 'Many sins I see in myself,' says he, 'and more there are which I cannot spot, which I cannot find out. Nay, I think that every man's sins are beyond his understanding.' There is not the best, the wisest, nor the holiest man in the world, who can give a full and entire list of his sins. "Who can understand his errors?" This interrogation has the force of an affirmation "Who can?" No man! No, not the most perfect and innocent man in the world. O friends! who can reckon up the secret sinful imaginations, the secret sinful inclinations, or the secret pride, the secret blasphemies, the secret hypocrisies, the secret atheistical risings, the secret murmurings, the secret repinings, the secret discontents, the secret insolencies, the secret filthinesses, the secret unbelievings, etc., that God might every day charge upon his soul? Should the best and holiest man on earth have but his secret sins every day written in his forehead, it would not only put him to a crimson blush—but it would make him pull his hat over his eyes, or cover his face with a double scarf!

So 1Ki_8 38, "When a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel--each one aware of the plague of his own heart," etc. **Sin is the greatest plague in the world—but never more dangerous than when it reaches the heart.** Now, secret sins commonly lie nearest the heart, the fountain from whence they take a quick, immediate, and continual supply. Secret sins are as near to original sin as the first droppings are to the spring-head. And as every secret sin lies nearest the heart, so every secret sin is the plague of the heart. Now, as secret diseases are not to be laid open to everyone—but only to the prudent physician; so our secret sins, which are the secret plagues, the secret diseases of our souls, are not to be laid open to everyone—but only to the physician of souls, that is only able both to cure them and pardon them.

And as all Christians have their secret sins, so all Christians have their secret **temptations**, 2Co_12 8-9. And as they have their secret temptations, so they have their secret **needs**; yes, many times they have such particular and personal needs that there is not one in the congregation, nor one in the family, that has the like. And as they have their secret needs, so they have their secret **fears**, and secret snares, and secret straits, and secret troubles, and secret doubts, and secret jealousies, etc. And how do all these things call aloud upon every Christian to be frequent and constant in secret prayer!

05 Twenty arguments to persuade you to contd

contd

[11.] Eleventhly, Consider, **Christ is very much affected and delighted in the secret prayers of his people**. Son_2 14, "O my dove who is in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is lovely." Christ observes his spouse when she is in the clefts of the rock; when she is gotten into a corner a-praying, he looks upon her with singular delight, and with special intimations of his love. Nothing is more sweet, delightful, and welcome to Christ than the secret services of his people. Their secret breathings are like lovely songs to him, Mal_3 4; their secret prayers in the clefts of the rock, or under the stairs, are as sweet incense to Jesus. The spouse retires to the secret places of the stairs not only for security—but also for secrecy, that so she might the more freely, without suspicion of hypocrisy, pour out her soul into the bosom of her beloved. The great delight that parents take in the secret lispings and whisperings of their children, is no delight to that which Christ takes in the secret prayers of his people. And therefore, as you would be friends and furtherers of Christ's delight, be much in secret prayer.

[12.] Twelfthly, Consider **you are the only people in all the world whom God has made choice of to reveal his secrets to.** Joh_15 15, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knows not what his Lord loth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Everything that God the Father had communicated to Christ as mediator to be revealed to his servants, he made known to his disciples as to his bosom-friends. Christ loves his people as friends, and he uses them as friends, and he opens his heart to them as friends. There is nothing in the heart of Christ that concerns the internal and eternal welfare of his friends—but he reveals it to them he reveals himself, his love, his eternal good will, the mysteries of faith, and the secrets of his covenant—to his friends. [1Co_2 10-11; Joh_1 9; Rom_16 25; 1Co_2 7; Eph_3 3-4; Eph_3 9] Christ loves not to entertain his friends with things that are commonly and vulgarly known. Christ will reveal the secrets of his mind, the secrets of his love, the secrets of his thoughts, the secrets of his heart, and the secrets of his purposes—to all his bosom-friends. Samson could not hide his mind, his secrets, from Delilah, though it cost him his life, Jdg_16 15-17; and do you think that Christ can hide his mind, his secrets, from them for whom he has laid down his life? Surely no. O sirs! Christ is,

(1.) A universal friend.

(2.) An omnipotent friend, an almighty friend. He is no less than thirty times called Almighty in that book of Job; he can do above all expressions and beyond all apprehensions.

(3.) He is an omniscient friend.

(4.) He is an omnipresent friend.

(5.) He is an indeficient friend.

(6.) He is an independent friend.

(7.) He is an unchangeable friend.

(8.) He is a watchful friend.

(9.) He is a tender and compassionate friend.

(10.) He is a close and faithful friend; and therefore he cannot but open and unbosom himself to all his bosom friends. To be reserved and close is against the very law of friendship. Faithful friends are very free in imparting their thoughts, their minds, their secrets, one to another. A real friend accounts nothing worth knowing unless he makes it known to his friends. He opens up his greatest and most inward secrets to his friends. Job calls his friends "inward friends," or the men of his secrets, Job_19 19. All Christ's friends are inward friends; they are the men of his secrets Pro_3 32, "His secrets are with the righteous," that is, his covenant and fatherly affection, which is hidden and secret from the world. He who is righteous in secret, where no man sees him, he is the righteous man, to whom God will communicate his closest secrets, as to his dearest bosom-friend. It is only a bosom-friend to whom we will unbosom ourselves. So Psa_25 14, The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him; and he will show them his covenant."

Now, there **are three sorts of divine secrets**

(1.) First, There are secrets of **providence**, and these he reveals to the righteous, and to those who fear him, Psa_107 43; Hos_14 9. The prophet Amos speaks of these secrets of providence Amo_3 7, Surely the Lord God will do nothing—but he reveals his secrets unto his servants and prophets." Micah knew the secret of the Lord concerning Ahab, which neither Zedekiah nor any other of the false prophets knew. So Gen_18 17, "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" The destruction of Sodom was a secret that lay in the bosom of God; but Abraham being a bosom-friend, God communicates this secret to him, Gen_18 19-21. Abraham was a friend, a faithful friend, a special friend, Jas_2 23; and therefore God makes him both of his court and counsel. Oh how greatly does God condescend to his people. He speaks to them as a man would speak to his friend; and there is no secrets of providence, which may be for their advantage—but he will reveal them to his faithful servants. As all faithful friends have the same friends and the same enemies, so they are mutual in the communication of their secrets one to another; and so it was between God and Abraham.

(2.) Secondly, There are the secrets of his **kingdom**; and these he reveals to his people Mat_13 11, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven—but unto them it is not given." So Mat_11 25, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes." "Let us not think," says Jerome, that the gospel is in the words of Scripture—but in the sense; not in the outside—but in the marrow; not in the leaves of words—but in the root of reason."

There are many choice, secret, hidden, and mysterious truths and doctrines in the gospel, which Christ reveals to his people, that this poor, blind, ignorant world are strangers to. [Joe_2 28; 1Ti_3 9; 1Ti_3 16; Col_1 26-27; 1Co_2 9-12; Eph_4 21] There are many secrets wrapped up in the plainest truths and doctrines of the gospel, which none can effectually open and reveal but the Spirit of the Lord, who searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. There are many secrets and mysteries in the gospel, that all the learning and labor in the world can never give a man insight into. There are many who know the doctrine of the gospel, the history of the gospel—who are utter strangers to the secrets of the gospel. There is a secret power, a secret authority, a secret efficacy, a secret prevalency, a secret goodness, a secret sweetness in the gospel—that none experience but those to whom the Lord is pleased to impart gospel secrets to Isa_29 11-12, "Seal my law among my disciples." The law of God to wicked men is a sealed book that they cannot understand, Dan_12 9-10. It is as blotted paper that they cannot read.

Look! as a private letter to a friend contains secret matter that no other man may read because it is sealed; so the law of grace is sealed up under the secret-seal of heaven, so that no man can open it or read it—but Christ's faithful friends to whom it is sent. The whole Scripture, says Gregory, is but one entire letter despatched from the Lord Christ to his beloved spouse on earth. The Rabbis say that there are four keys that God has under his belt
1, the key of the clouds;
2, the key of the womb;
3, the key of the grave;
4, the key of food;
and I may add a fifth key that is under his belt, and that is the key of the word, the key of the Scripture; which key none can turn but he who "has the key of David, who opens, and no man shuts; and who shuts, and no man opens," Rev_3 7.

O sirs! God reveals himself, and his mind, and will, and truth—to his people, in a more friendly and familiar way than he does to others Mar_4 11, "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God but unto those who are outside, all these things are done in parables " Luk_8 10, "And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." Though great doctors, and profound teachers, and deep-studied but unsanctified divines, may know much of the doctrines of the gospel, and commend much the doctrines of the gospel, and dispute much for the doctrines of the gospel, and glory much in the doctrines of the gospel, and take a great deal of pains to dress and trim up the doctrines of the gospel, with the flowers of rhetoric or eloquence; though it be much better to present truth in her native plainness, than to hang her ears with counterfeit pearls. The word, without human adornments, is like the stone garamantides, that has drops of gold in itself, sufficient to enrich the believing soul. Yet the special, spiritual, powerful, and saving knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, is a secret, a mystery, yes, a hidden mystery to them, Rom_16 25; 1Co_2 7.

Chrysostom compares the mysteries of Christ, in regard of the wicked, to a written book, that the ignorant can neither read nor spell; he sees the cover, the covers, and the letters—but he understands not the meaning of what he sees. He compares the mystery of grace to an indited epistle, which an unschooled man viewing, he cannot read it, he cannot understand it; he knows it is paper and ink—but the sense, the matter, he knows not, he understands not. So unsanctified people, though they are ever so learned, and though they may perceive the letter of the mystery of Christ—yet they perceive not, they understand not, the mystery of grace, the inward sense of the Spirit, in the blessed Scriptures. Though the devil is the greatest scholar in the world, and though he has more learning than all the men in the world have—yet there are many thousand secrets and mysteries in the gospel of grace, that he knows not really, spiritually, feelingly, efficaciously, powerfully, thoroughly, savingly, etc.

Oh—but now Christ makes known himself, his mind, his grace, his truth, to his people, in a more clear, full, familiar, and friendly way 2Sa_7 27, "For you, O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, have revealed to your servant;" so you read it in your books; but in the Hebrew it is thus "Lord, you have revealed this to the ear of your servant." Now, the emphasis lies in that word, to the ear, which is left out in your books. When God makes known himself to his people, he reveals things to their ears, as we use to do to a friend who is intimate with us we speak a thing to his ear. There is many a secret which Jesus Christ speaks in the ears of his servants, which others never come to be acquainted with 2Co_4 6, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The six several gradations that are in this scripture are worthy of our most serious consideration. Here is,
First, Knowledge; and,
Secondly, The knowledge of the glory of God; and,
Thirdly, The light of the knowledge of the glory of God; and,
Fourthly, Shining; and,
Fifthly, Shining into our hearts; and,
Sixthly, Shining into our hearts in the face of Jesus Christ.
And thus you see that the Lord reveals the secrets of himself, his kingdom, his truth, his grace, his glory, to the saints. But,

(3.) Thirdly, There are the secrets of his favor, the secrets of his special love, which he opens to them; the secret purposes of his heart to save them; and these are those great secrets, those "deep things of God," which none can reveal "but the Spirit of God." Now these great secrets, these deep things of God, God does reveal to his people by his Spirit 1Co_2 9-12, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." Now what are the things that are freely given to us of God—but our election, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification? And why has God given us his Spirit—but that we should know "the things that are freely given to us of God."

Some by *secret* in Psalms 25, understand a particular assurance of God's favors, whereby happiness is secured to us, both for the present and for the future. They understand by secret, the sealing of the Spirit, the hidden manna, the white stone, and the new name in it, "which none knows but he who has it." And so much those words, "He will show them his covenant," seems to import for what greater secret can God impart to his people, than that of opening the covenant of grace to them in its freeness, fullness, sureness, sweetness, suitableness, everlastingness, and in sealing up his good pleasure, and all the spiritual and eternal blessings of the covenant to them?

Such as love and serve the Lord shall be of his cabinet-council, they shall know his soul-secrets, and be admitted into a very gracious familiarity and friendship with himself Joh_14 21-23, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." God and Christ will keep house with them, and manifest the secrets of their love to those who are observant of their commands.

And thus you see that the saints are the only people to whom God will reveal the secrets of his providence, the secrets of his kingdom, and the secrets of his love unto. Christ came out of the bosom of his Father, and he opens all the secrets of his Father only to his bosom-friends. Now what an exceeding high honor is it for God to open the secrets of his love, the secrets of his promises, the secrets of his providences, the secrets of his counsels, and the secrets of his covenant—to his people!

Tiberius Caesar thought no man fit to know his secrets. And among the Persians none but noblemen, lords, and dukes, might be made partakers of state secrets; they esteeming secrecy a divine thing. But now such honor God has put upon all his saints, as to make them lords and nobles, and the only privy statesmen in the court of heaven. The highest honor and glory that earthly princes can put upon their subjects is to communicate to them their greatest secrets. Now this high honor and glory the King of kings has put upon his people; "For his secrets are with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant." It was a high honor to Elisha, 2Ki_6 12, that he could tell the secrets that were spoken in the king's bedchamber. Oh! what an honor must it then be for the saints to know the secrets that are spoken in the presence-chamber of the King of kings!

Now I appeal to the very consciences of all who fear the Lord, whether it be not a just, equal, righteous, and necessary thing, that the people of God should freely and fully lay open all the secrets of their hearts before the Lord, who has thus highly honored them, as to reveal the secrets of his providence, kingdom, and favor to them? Yes, I appeal to all serious and sincere Christians, whether it be not against the light and law of nature, and against the law of love, and law of friendship, to be reserved and close, yes, to hide our secrets from him who reveals his greatest and our choicest secrets to us? And if it is, why then do not you in secret lay open all your secret sins, and secret wants, and secret desires, secret fears, etc., to him who sees in secret? You know all secrets are to be communicated only in secret. None but fools will communicate secrets upon a stage, or before many. But,

[13.] Thirteenthly, Consider, **that in times of great straits and trials, in times of great afflictions and persecutions, private prayer is the Christian's food and drink**; it is his chief city of refuge; it is his shelter and hiding-place in a stormy day. When the saints have been driven by violent persecutions into holes, and caves, and dens, and deserts, and howling wildernesses, private prayer has been their food and drink, and Christ their only refuge. [Heb_11 37-38; Rev_12 6; Psa_102 6-14]

When Esau came forth with hostile intentions against **Jacob**, secret prayer was Jacob's refuge Genesis 32, "Then Jacob prayed, 'O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper.'" Promises in private must be prayed over. God loves to be pleaded with upon his own word, when he and his people are alone. "Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children;" or upon the children, meaning he will put all to death. Some look upon the words to be a metaphor taken from fowlers, who kill and take away the young and the mothers together, contrary to that old law, Deu_22 6. Others say it is a phrase that does most lively represent the tenderness of a mother, who, seeing her children in distress, spares not her own body nor life, to hazard it for her children's preservation, by interposing herself, even to be massacred together with and upon them, Hos_10 14. When Jacob, and all that was near and dear unto him, were in eminent danger of being cut off by Esau, and those men of blood that were with him, he betakes himself to private prayer as his only city of refuge against the rage and malice of the mighty.

And so when **Jeremiah** was in a solitary and loathsome dungeon, private prayer was his food and drink, it was his only city of refuge Jer_33 1-3, "While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the Lord came to him a second time "This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it--the Lord is his name 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." When Jeremiah was in a lonesome, loathsome prison, God encourages him by private prayer, to seek for further discoveries and revelations of those choice and singular favors, which in future times he purposed to confer upon his people.

So 2Ch_33 11-13, "So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God." When Manasseh was in fetters in his enemy's country, when he was stripped of all his princely glory, and led captive into Babylon, he betakes himself to private prayer as his only city of refuge; and by this means he prevails with God for his restoration to his crown and kingdom.

Private prayer is a city of refuge that no power nor policy, no craft nor cruelty, no violence nor force, is ever able to take by surprise. Though the joint prayers of the people of God together were often obstructed and hindered in the times of the ten persecutions—yet they were never able to obstruct or hinder secret prayer, private prayer. When men and devils have done their worst, every Christian will be able to maintain his private prayer with heaven. Private prayer will shelter a Christian against all the national, domestic, and personal storms and tempests that may threaten him. When a man is lying upon a sickbed alone, or when a man is in prison alone, or when a man is with Job left upon the ash-heap alone, or when a man is with John banished for the testimony of Jesus into this or that island alone—oh then private prayer will be his food and drink, his shelter, his hiding-place, his heaven. When all other trades fail, this trade of private prayer will hold good. But,

[14.] Fourteenthly, **Consider that God is omnipresent**. [Jer_16 17; Job_34 21; Pro_5 21; Jer_32 19; Rev_2 23; Lam_3 66] We cannot get into any blind hole, or dark corner, or secret place—but the Lord has an eye there, the Lord will keep us company there Mat_6 6, And your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you openly." So Mat_6 18. There is not the darkest, dirtiest hole in the world into which a saint creeps—but God has a favorable eye there. God never lacks an **eye** to see our secret tears, nor an **ear** to hear our secret cries and groans, nor a **heart** to grant our secret requests; and therefore we ought to pour out our souls to him in secret Psa_38 9, "Lord! all my desire is before you; and my groaning is not hidden from you." Though our private desires are ever so confused, though our private requests are ever so broken, and though our private groanings are ever so much hidden from men—yet God eyes them all, God records them all, and God puts them all upon the record-file of heaven, and will one day crown them with glorious answers and returns.

We cannot sigh out a prayer in secret—but he sees us; we cannot lift up our eyes to him at midnight—but he observes us. The eye which God has upon his people when they are in secret, is such a special tender eye of love, as opens his ear, his heart, and his hand, for their good 1Pe_3 12, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers;" or, as the Greek has it, "his ears are unto their prayers. If their prayers are so faint, that they cannot reach up as high as heaven, then God will bow the heavens and come down to their prayers." God's eye is upon every secret sigh, and every secret groan, and every secret tear, and every secret desire, and every secret pant of love, and every secret breathing of soul, and every secret melting and working of heart; all which should encourage us to be much in secret duties, in closet services. As a Christian is never out of the reach of God's hand, so he is never out of the view of God's eye.

If a Christian cannot hide himself from the sun, which is God's minister of light, how impossible will it be to hide himself from him whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun? In every private duty, a Christian is still under the eye of God's omniscience. When we are in the darkest hole, God has windows into our bosoms, and observes all the secret actings of our inward man, 1Ti_2 8. The eye of God is not confined to this place or that, to this company or that; God has an eye upon his people as well when they are alone, as when they are among a multitude; as well when they are in a corner, as when they are in a crowd. Diana's temple was burnt down when she was busy at Alexander's birth, and could not be at two places at one time. But God is present both in paradise and in the wilderness, both in the family and in the closet, both in public and in private at the same time. God is an omnipresent God. As he is not confined to one place, so he is excluded from no place Jer_23 24, "Can any man hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, says the Lord?"

Pro_15 3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," or, "contemplating the evil and the good," as the Hebrew may be read. Now, to contemplate, is more than simply to behold; for contemplation adds to a simple apprehension, a deeper degree of knowledge, entering into the very inside of a matter; and so indeed does God discern the very inward intentions of the heart, and the most secret motions of the spirit. God is an infinite and immense being, whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere. Now, if our God is omnipresent, then wherever we are, our God is present with us if we are in prison alone with Joseph, our God is present with us there; or if we are in exile alone with David, our God is present with us there; or if we are alone in our closets, our God is present with us there. God sees us in secret; and therefore let us seek his face in secret. Though heaven is God's palace—yet it is not his prison. But,

[15.] Fifteenthly, **He who willingly neglects private prayer shall certainly be neglected in his public prayer**; he who will not call upon God in secret shall find by sad experience that God will neither hear him nor regard him in public. Neglect of private duties is the great reason why the hearts of many are so dead and dull, so formal and carnal, so barren and unfruitful under public ordinances. Oh that Christians would seriously lay this to heart! Certainly, that man or woman's heart is best in public—who is most frequent in private. They make most yearnings in public ordinances—who are most conscientiously exercised in closet duties. No man's graces rise so high, nor any man's experiences rise so high, nor any man's communion with God rises so high, nor any man's divine enjoyments rise so high, nor any man's springs of comfort rise so high, nor any man's hopes rise so high, nor any man's parts and gifts rise so high, etc., as theirs do, who conscientiously wait upon God in their closets before they wait upon him in the assembly of his people; and who when they return from public ordinances retire into their closets and look up to heaven for a blessing upon the public means.

It is certain that private duties fit the soul for public ordinances. He who makes conscience to wait upon God in private, shall find by experience that God will wonderfully bless public ordinances to him, Mic_2 7. My design is not to set up one ordinance of God above another, nor to cause one ordinance of God to clash with another—the public with the private, or the private with the public—but that every ordinance may have its proper place and right, the desires of my soul being to prize every ordinance, and to praise every ordinance, and to practice every ordinance, and to improve every ordinance, and to bless the Lord for every ordinance. But as ever you would see the beauty and glory of God in his sanctuary, as ever you would have public ordinances to be lovely and lively to your souls, as ever you would have your drooping spirits revived, and your languishing souls refreshed, and your weak graces strengthened, and your strong corruptions weakened under public ordinances—be more careful and conscientious in the performance of closet duties, Psa_63 1-3.

Oh how strong in grace! Oh how victorious over sin! Oh how dead to the world! Oh how alive to Christ! Oh how fit to live! Oh how prepared to die! might many a Christian have been, had they been but more frequent, serious, and conscientious in the discharge of closet-duties. Not but that I think there is a truth in that saying of Bede—the word church being rightly understood—namely, That he who comes not willingly to church shall one day go unwillingly to hell. But,

[16.] Sixteenthly, Consider, **the times wherein we live call aloud for secret prayer**. Hell seems to be broken loose, and men turned into incarnate devils; soul-damning wickednesses walk up and down the streets with a whore's forehead, without the least check or restraint Jer_3 3, "You have a whore's forehead, you refuse to be ashamed!" Jer_6 15, "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush!" They had sinned away shame, instead of being ashamed of sin. *Continuance in sin* had quite banished all sense of sin and all shame for sin, so that they would not allow nature to draw her *veil of blushing* before their great abominations. They were like to Caligula, a wicked emperor, who used to say of himself, that he loved nothing better about himself—than that he could not be ashamed. The same words are repeated in Jer_8 12. How applicable these scriptures are to the present time I will leave the prudent reader to judge.

But what does the prophet do, now that they were as bold in sin and as shameless as so many harlots? That you may see in Jer_13 17 "But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places," or secrecies, "for your pride; and my eye shall weep sore" (Hebrew, weeping weep, or shedding tears shed tears; the doubling of the verb notes the bitter and grievous lamentation that he should make for them), "and run down with tears." Now that they were grown up to that height of sin and wickedness, that that they were above all shame and blushing; now they were grown so proud, so hardened, so obstinate, so rebellious, so bent on self destruction; that no mercies could melt them or allure them, nor any threatenings nor judgments could in any way terrify them or stop them. The prophet goes into a corner, he retires himself into the most secret places, and there he weeps bitterly, there he weeps as if he were resolved to drown himself in his own tears!

When the springs of sorrow rise high, a Christian turns his back upon company, and retires himself into places of greatest privacy, that so he may the more freely and the more fully vent his sorrow and grief before the Lord. Ah, England, England! what pride, luxury, lasciviousness, licentiousness, wantonness, drunkenness, cruelties, injustice, oppressions, fornications, adulteries, falsehoods, hypocrisy, bribery, atheism, horrid blasphemies, and hellish impieties, are now to be found rampant in the midst of you! Ah, England! England! how are the Lord's pure ordinances despised, Scriptures rejected, the Spirit resisted and derided, the righteous reviled, wickedness tolerated, and Christ many thousand times in a day by these cursed practices, afresh crucified! Ah, England! England! were our forefathers alive, how sadly would they blush to see such a horrid degenerate posterity as is to be found in the midst of you! How is our forefathers' generosity converted into riot and luxury, their frugality into pride and prodigality, their simplicity into subtlety, their sincerity into hypocrisy, their charity into cruelty, their chastity into fornication and wantonness, their sobriety into drunkenness, their plain-dealing into fraud, their works of compassion into works of oppression, and their love to the people of God into an utter enmity against the people of God! etc.

And what is the voice of all these crying abominations—but every Christian to his closet, every Christian to his closet, and there weep, with weeping Jeremiah, bitterly, for all these great abominations whereby God is dishonored openly. Oh weep in secret for their sins who openly glory in their sins, which should be their greatest shame. Oh blush in secret for those who are past all blushing for their sins; for who knows but that the whole land may fare the better for the sakes of a few who are mourners in secret? But however it goes with the nation, such as mourn in secret for the abominations of the times, may be confident that when sweeping judgments shall come upon the land, the Lord will hide them in the secret chambers of his providence, he will set a secret mark of deliverance upon their foreheads, who mourn in secret for the crying sins of the present day, as he did upon theirs in Eze_9 4-6.

[17.] Seventeenthly, **Consider that the near and dear relations that you stand in to the Lord, calls aloud for secret prayer**.

You are his **friends**. Joh_15 14-15. Now, a true friend loves to visit his friend when he may find him alone, and enjoy privacy with him. A true friend loves to pour out his heart into the bosom of his friend when he has him in a corner, or in the field, or under a hedge.

You are his **favorites**; and what favorite is there that hides his secret from his prince? Do not all favorites open their hearts to their princes when they are alone?

You are his **children**; and what sincere child is there, who does not delight to be much with his father when he is alone, when nobody is by? Oh, how free and open are children when they have their parents alone, beyond what they are when company is present.

You are the **spouse** of Christ; and what spouse, what wife is there that does not love to be much with her husband when he is alone? True lovers are always best when they are most alone "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me. Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom—there I will give you my love." Son_7 10-12. The spouse of Christ is very desirous to enjoy his company in the fields, that so, having her beloved alone, she might the more freely and the more secretly open her heart to him. As wives, when they are walking alone with their husbands in the fields, are more free to open their minds and the secrets of their hearts, than they are when in their houses with their children and servants about them—so it was with the spouse.

They have very great cause to question whether they are Christ's real friends, favorites, children, spouse—who seldom or never converse with Christ in their closets, who are shy of Christ when they are alone, who never accustom themselves to give Christ secret visits. What Delilah said to Samson, Jdg_16 15, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you have not told me wherein your great strength lies" (the discovery of which secret at last cost him his life).

That, Christ may say to very many in our days "How can you say you love me, when you never acquaint me with your secrets? How can you say you love me—when you never bestow any private visits upon me? How can you say that you are my friends, my faithful friends, my bosom-friends—when you never in private unbosom yourselves to me? How can you say that you are my favorites—when you can spend one week after another, and one month after another, and yet not let me know one of all your secrets; when every day you might have my ear in secret if you pleased? How can you say that you are my children—and yet be so closed and reserved as you are? How can you say you are my spouse—and yet never take any delight to open your hearts, your secrets, to me when I am alone?"

What Alexander said to one who was of his name—but a coward, 'Either lay down the name of Alexander—or fight like Alexander,' that I say to you, Either be frequent in closet duties, as becomes a Christian—or else lay down the name of a Christian; either unbosom yourselves in secret to Christ, as friends, favorites, children, spouses—or else lay down these names, etc. But,

[18.] Eighteenthly, Consider that **God has set a special mark of favor, honor, and observation, upon those who have prayed in secret**. As you may see in Moses, Exo_34 28; and in Abraham, Gen_21 33; and in Isaac, Gen_24 63; and in Jacob, Gen_32 24-29; and in David, Psa_55 16-17; and in Daniel, Dan_6 10; and in Paul, Act_9 11; and in Cornelius, Act_10 2; Act_10 4; and in Peter, Act_10 9-12; and in Manasseh, 2Ch_33 18-19. God has put all these worthies who have exercised themselves in secret prayer upon record, to their everlasting fame and honor. The Persians seldom write their king's name but in letters of gold. God has written, as I may say, their names in letters of gold—who have made conscience of exercising themselves in secret prayer. The precious names of those who have addicted themselves to closet-duties are as statues of gold, which the polluted breath of men can no ways stain; they are like so many shining suns which no clouds can darken; they are like so many sparkling diamonds which shine brightest in the darkest night.

A Christian can never get into a hole, a corner, a closet, to pour out his soul before the Lord—but the Lord makes an honorable observation of him, and sets a secret mark of favor upon him, Eze_9 4-6. And how should this provoke all Christians to be much with God alone! The Romans were very ambitious of obtaining a great name, a great report, in this world; and why should not Christians be as divinely ambitious of obtaining a good name, a good report, in the eternal world? Heb_11 39. A good name is always better than a great name, and a name in heaven is infinitely better than a thousand names on earth; and the way to both these is to be much with God in secret. But,

[19.] Nineteenthly, **Consider that Satan is a very great enemy to secret prayer.** Secret prayer is a scourge, a hell to Satan. Every secret prayer adds to the devil's torment, and every secret sigh adds to his torment, and every secret groan adds to his torment, and every secret tear adds to his torment. When a child of God is on his knees in his secret addresses to God, oh the strange thoughts, the earthly thoughts, the wandering thoughts, the distracted thoughts, the hideous thoughts, the blasphemous thoughts—which Satan often injects into his soul! and all to draw him off from secret prayer. Sometimes he tells the soul, that it is in vain to seek God in secret; and at other times he tells the soul it is too late to seek God in secret; for the door of mercy is shut, and there is no hope, no help for the soul. Sometimes he tells the soul that it is enough to seek God in public; and at other times he tells the soul, that it is futile to seek the Lord in private. Sometimes he tells the soul, that it is not elected, and therefore all his secret prayers shall be rejected; and at other times he tells the soul, that it is sealed up unto the day of wrath, and therefore a secret prayer can never reverse that seal; and all this to dishearten and discourage a poor Christian in his secret retirements.

Sometimes Satan will object to a poor Christian the greatness of his sins; and at other times he will object against a Christian the greatness of his unworthiness. Sometimes he will object against a Christian his lack of grace; and at other times he will object against a Christian his lack of gifts to manage such a duty as it should be managed. Sometimes he will object against a Christian his former straitenedness in secret prayer; and at other times he will object against a Christian the small yearnings that he makes of secret prayer; and all to work the soul out of love with secret prayer; yes, to work the soul to loathe secret prayer! So deadly an enemy is Satan to secret prayer. Oh, the strange fears, fancies, and conceits, that Satan often raises in the spirits of Christians, when they are alone with God in a corner; and all to work them to cast off private prayer. It is none of Satan's least designs to interrupt a Christian in his private communion with God.

Satan watches all a Christian's motions; so that he cannot turn into his closet, nor creep into any hole to converse privately with his God—but he follows him hard at heels, and will be still injecting one thing or another into the soul, or else objecting one thing or another against the soul. A Christian is as well able to count the stars of heaven, and to number the sands of the sea—as he is able to number up the various devices and sleights which Satan uses to obstruct the soul's private addresses to God. Now from that great opposition that Satan makes against private prayer, a Christian may safely conclude these five things

(1.) First, **The excellency of private prayer.** Certainly if it were not an excellent thing for a man to be in secret with God, Satan would never make such head against it.

(2.) Secondly, **The necessity of private prayer.** The more necessary any duty is to the internal and eternal welfare of a Christian, the more Satan will bestir himself to blunt a Christian's spirit in that duty.

(3.) Thirdly, **The utility or profit that attends a conscientious discharge of private prayer.** Where we are likely to gain most, there Satan loves to oppose most.

(4.) Fourthly, **The prevalency of private prayer.** If there were not a kind of omnipotency in it, if it were not able to do wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, and wonders in the hearts and lives and ways of men—Satan would never have such an aching tooth against it as he has.

(5.) Fifthly, That **God is highly honored by private prayer**, or else Satan would never be so greatly enraged against it. This is certain. The more glory God has from any service we do, the more Satan will strive by all his wiles and sleights to take us, either off from that service, or so to interrupt us in that service—that God may have no honor, nor we no good, nor himself no hurt, by our private retirements. But, in the

[20.] Twentieth and last place, Consider, that **you alone are the Lord's secret ones, his hidden ones**; and therefore if you do not apply yourselves to private prayer, and to your secret retirements, that you may enjoy God in a corner—none will. It is only God's hidden ones, his secret ones—who are spirited, principled, and prepared to wait on God in secret Exo_19 5, "Then shall you be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." The Hebrew word signifies God's special jewels, God's proper ones, or God's secret ones—that he keeps in store for himself, and for his own special service and use. Princes lock up with their own hands in secret their most precious and costly jewels; and so does God his Psa_135 4, "For the Lord has chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure," or for his secret gem. Psa_83 3, "They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted against your hidden ones," or your secret ones; so called partly because God hides them in the secret of his tabernacle, Psa_31 20, and partly because God sets as high a value upon them as men do upon their hidden treasure, their secret treasure; yes, he makes more reckoning of them than he does of all the world besides!

And so the world shall know, when God shall arise to revenge the wrongs and injuries that has been done to his secret ones. Neither are there any on earth who know so much of the secrets of his love, of the secrets of his counsels, of the secrets of his purposes, of the secrets of his heart—as his secret ones do. Neither are there any in all the world, who are under those secret influences, those secret assistances, those secret blessings, those secret anointings of the Spirit—as his secret ones are under. And therefore, no wonder if God calls them again, and again, and again, his secret ones.

Now, what can be more lovely or more desirable than to see their natures and their practices to answer to their names? They are the Lord's secret ones, his hidden ones; and therefore how highly does it concern them to be much with God in secret, and to hide themselves with God in a corner! Shall Nabal's nature and practice answer to his name? 1Sa_25 25, "I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don't pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests." Nabal signifies a fool, a sot, a churl; it notes one that is void of wisdom and goodness; it signifies one whose mind, reason, judgment, and understanding is withered and decayed. Now, if you look into the story, you shall find that as face answers to face, so Nabal's nature and practice did echo and answer to his name. And why then, should not our natures and practices answer to our names also? We are called the Lord's secret ones, his hidden ones; and how highly therefore does it concern us to be much with God in secret! Why should there be any jarring or discord between our names and our practices?

It is observable that the practice and conduct of other saints have been answerable to their names. **Isaac** signifies laughter, and Isaac was a gracious son, a dutiful son, a son who kept clear of those abominations with which many of the patriarchs had defiled themselves, a son who proved matter of joy and laughter to his father and mother all their days. So **Josiah** signifies "the fire of the Lord;" and his practice did answer to his name. Witness the pulling down of Jeroboam's altar, and his burning of the vessels that were made for Baal, and his pulling down the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had set up, and his burning the grove at the brook Kedron, and his grinding it to powder, and his breaking down the houses of the Sodomites, and his defiling of the high places where the priests had burnt incense, and his breaking in pieces the images, and cutting down the groves, and filling their places with the bones of men, etc., 1Ki_13 2; 2Ki_23 4-21. So **Joshua** signifies "a Savior;" and his practice was answerable to his name. Though he could not save his people from their sins—yet he often saved them from their sufferings. Great and many were the deliverances, the salvations, that were instrumentally brought about by Joshua, as all know who have read the book of Joshua. So **John** signifies "gracious," and his practice was answerable to his name. He was so gracious in his teachings and in his walkings that he gained favor in the very eyes of his enemies.

By all these instances, and by many more that might be given, you see that other saints' practices have answered to their names. Therefore, let everyone of us see that our practices do also answer to our names, that as we are called the Lord's secret ones, so we may be much with God in secret, that so there may be a blessed harmony between our names and our practices; and we may never repent another day that we have been called God's secret ones, his "hidden ones," but yet never made conscience of maintaining secret communion with God in our closets. And thus you see that there are no less than twenty arguments to persuade you to closet prayer—and to maintain private communion with God in a corner.

06 To those who are strangers to closet prayer

To those who are strangers to closet prayer

Is it so that closet prayer or private prayer is such an indispensable duty, that Christ himself has laid upon all who are not willing to lie under the woeful brand of being hypocrites? Then **this doctrine condemns five sorts of people**.

(1.) First, It looks sourly and sadly upon all **those who put off secret prayer, private prayer, until they are moved to it by the Spirit**; for by this sad delusion many have been kept from secret prayer many weeks, many months; oh that I might not say, many years! Though it be a very at season to pray when the Spirit moves us to pray—yet it is not the only season to pray, Isa_62 1; Psa_123 1-2; Gal_4 6. He who makes piety his business, will pray as daily for daily grace as he does pray daily for daily bread Luk_18 1, "And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." 1Th_5 17, "Pray without ceasing." Eph_6 18, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." Rom_12 12, "Persistent in prayer." The Greek is a metaphor taken from hunting dogs, which never give up the chase until they have got their prey. A Christian must not only pray—but hold on in prayer, until he has got the heavenly prize.

We are always **needing**; and therefore we had need be praying always. The **world** is always alluring; and therefore we had need be always a-praying. **Satan** is always a-tempting; and therefore we had need be always a-praying. We are always **a-sinning**; and therefore we had need be always a-praying. We are in **dangers** always; and therefore we had need be praying always. We are **dying** always, 1Co_15 31; and therefore we had need be praying always. Man's whole life is but a lingering death; man no sooner begins to live—but he begins to die. When one was asked why he prayed six times a day, he only gave this answer, "I must die, I must die, I must die." Dying Christians had need be praying Christians, and those who are always a-dying had need be always a-praying. Certainly prayerless families are graceless families, and prayerless people are graceless people, Jer_10 25. It were better ten thousand times that we had never been born into the world, than that we should go stillborn out of the world. But,

(2.) Secondly, This truth looks sourly and sadly upon **those who pray not at all**, neither in their families nor in their closets. Among all God's children, there is not one possessed with a dumb devil. Prayerless people are forsaken of God, blinded by Satan, hardened in sin, and every breath they draw liable to all temporal, spiritual, and eternal judgments. Prayer is that part of natural worship due to God, which none will deny but stark atheists, Psa_14 1.

It is observable that among the worst of men, Turks, and the worst of Turks, the Moors, it is usual with them to pray six times a day.

(1.) Before the daybreak they pray for day.

(2.) When it is day, they give thanks for day.

(3.) At noon, they thank God for half the day past.

(4.) After that, they pray for a good sunset.

(5.) And after that, they thank God for the day past.

And then, sixthly and lastly, they pray for a good night after their day.

Certainly these very Moors will one day rise in judgment against them who cast off prayer, who live in a total neglect of prayer, who allow so many suns and moons to rise and set upon their heads without any solemn calling upon God. I have read of a man who, being sick, and afraid of death, fell to his prayers; and, to move God to hear him, told him "that he was no common beggar, and that he had never troubled him with his prayers before; and if he would but hear him at that time, he would never trouble him again." This world is full of such profane, blasphemous, atheistical wretches. But,

(3.) Thirdly, This truth looks very sourly and sadly upon **such who are all for public prayer—but never regard private prayer**; who are all for going up to the temple—but never care for going into their closets. This is most palpable hypocrisy, for a man to be very zealous for public prayer—but very cold and careless as to private prayer. He who pretends conscience in the one, and makes no conscience of the other, is an hypocrite indeed, Mat_23 5, and Mat_6 1-2; Mat_6 5. And the devil knows well enough how to make his markets of all such hypocrites that are all for the prayers of the church—but total Gallios as to private prayer, Act_18 17. Such as perform all their private devotion in the church—but not in the chamber, do put too great a slight upon the authority of Christ, who says, "When you pray, enter into your chamber." He does not say, "When you pray, go to the church," but, "When you pray, go into your chamber." But,

(4.) Fourthly, This truth looks sadly and sourly upon such who in their closets **pray with a loud clamorous voice**. A Christian should shut both the door of his closet and the door of his lips so close, that none should hear without what he says within. "Enter into your closet," says Christ, "and when you have shut your door, pray." But what need a man shut his closet door, if he may prays with a clamorous voice, if he makes such a noise as all in the street or all in the house may hear him? The hen, when she lays her eggs, gets into a hole, a corner; but then she makes such a noise with her cackling, that she tells all in the house where she is, and about what she is. Such Christians who in their closets do imitate the hen, do rather pray to be seen, heard, and observed by men, than out of any noble design to glorify God, or to pour out their souls before him who sees in secret.

Sometimes children, when they are vexed, or afraid of the rod, will run behind the door, or get into a dark hole, and there they will lie crying, and sighing, and sobbing, that all the house may know where they are. Oh it is a childish thing so to cry, and sigh, and sob in our closets, as to tell all in the house where we are, and about what work we are. Well! Christians, for an effectual redress of this evil, frequently and seriously consider of these five things.

[1.] First, That **God sees in secret**.

[2.] Secondly, That **God has a quick ear, and is taken more with the voice of the heart, than he is with the clamor of the mouth**. God can easily hear the most secret breathings of your soul. God is more curious in observing the messages delivered by the heart, than he is those who are only delivered by the mouth. He who prays aloud in private, seems to tell others, that God does not understand the secret desires, and thoughts, and workings of his people's hearts.

[3.] Thirdly, **It is not fit, it is not convenient nor expedient, that any should be acquainted with our secret prayers—but God and our own souls.** Now it is as much our duty to look to what is expedient, as it is to look to what is lawful, 2Co_8 10; 1Co_6 12, "All things are lawful unto me—but all things are not expedient." So 1Co_10 23, "All things are lawful for me—but all things are not expedient all things are lawful for me—but all things edify not." Now it is so far from being expedient, that it is very high folly for men to lay open their secret infirmities unto others, that will rather deride them, than lift up a prayer for them.

[4.] Fourthly, **Loud prayers may be a hindrance and disturbance to others**, who may be busied near us.

[5.] Fifthly and lastly, **Hannah prayed and yet spoke never a word. Her heart was full—but her voice was not heard**, 1Sa_1 11. Moses prays and cries, and yet lets fall never a word Exo_14 15, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Why do you cry unto me?" Moses did not cry with any audible voice—but with inward sighs, and secret breathings, and wrestlings of soul; and these inward and secret cries, which made no noise, carried the day with God; for Moses is heard and answered, and his people are delivered. Oh the prevalency of those prayers which make no noise in the ears of others!

[5.] Fifthly and lastly, This truth looks sourly and sadly upon **those who do all they can to hinder and discourage others from this duty of duties, private prayer**; and that either by deriding or vilifying of the duty, or else by denying of it to be a duty, or else by their daily neglect of this duty, or else by denying those who are under them, time and opportunity for the discharge of this duty. In Mat_23 13, you have a woe pronounced against those who will neither go to heaven themselves, nor allow others to go, who are willing to enter into an everlasting rest. And so I say—Woe to those parents, and woe to those husbands, and woe to those masters and mistresses—who will neither pray in their closets themselves, nor allow their children, nor their wives, nor their servants, to pour out their souls before the Lord in a corner. O sirs! how will you answer this to your consciences, when you shall lie upon a dying bed! And how will you answer it to the Judge of all the world, when you shall stand before a judgment seat? Certainly all their sins, and all their neglects, and all their spiritual losses, that might have been prevented by their secret prayers, by their closet communion with God—will one day be charged upon your account! And oh that you were all so wise as to lay these things so to heart, that you may never hinder any who are under your care or charge, from private prayer any more!

07 Six objections stated and answered

Six objections stated and answered

Objection 1. But many will be ready to object and say, We have much business upon our hands, and we cannot spare time for private prayer; we have so much to do in our shops, and in our warehouses, and abroad with others, that we cannot spare time to wait upon the Lord in our closets.

Now to this objection I shall give these eight answers, that this objection may never have a resurrection more in any of your hearts.

(1.) First, What are all those businesses that are upon your hands, compared to those businesses and weighty affairs, which did lie upon the hands of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, Elijah, Nehemiah, Peter, Cornelius? and yet you find all these worthies exercising themselves in private prayers. And the king is commanded every day to read some part of God's word, notwithstanding all his great and weighty employments, Deu_17 18-20. Now certainly, sirs, your great businesses are little more than ciphers compared with theirs. And if there were any on earth that might have pleaded an exemption from private prayer, upon the account of business, of much business, of great business, these might have done it; but they were more honest and more noble than to neglect so choice a duty, upon the account of much business. These brave hearts made all their public employments stoop to private prayer; they would never allow their public employments to tread private prayer under foot. But,

(2.) Secondly, I answer, No men's outward affairs did ever more prosper than theirs did, who devoted themselves to private prayer, notwithstanding their many and great worldly employments. Witness the prosperity and outward flourishing estates of Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Nehemiah, David, Daniel, and Cornelius. These were much with God in their closets, and God blessed their blessings to them, Gen_22 17. How did their cups overflow! What signal favors did God heap upon them and theirs! No families have been so prospered, protected, and graced, as theirs who have maintained secret communion with God in a corner, 1Ch_11 9. Private prayer does best expedite our temporal affairs. He who prays well in his closet, shall be sure to speed well in his shop, or at his plough, or whatever else he turns his hand unto, 1Ti_4 8. It is true, Abimelech was rich as well as Abraham, and so was Laban rich as well as Jacob, and Saul was a king as well as David, and Julian was an emperor as well as Constantine; but it was only Abraham, Jacob, David, and Constantine, who had their blessings blessed unto them; all the rest had their blessings cursed unto them, Pro_3 33; Mal_2 2. They had many good things—but they had not "the good will of him who dwelt in the bush" with what they had; and therefore all their mercies were but *bitter sweets* unto them.

Though all the sons of Jacob returned laden from Egypt with grain and money in their sacks—yet Benjamin alone had the silver cup in the mouth of his sack. So though the men of the world have their grain and their money, etc.—yet it is only God's Benjamins who have the silver cup, the grace cup, the cup of blessing, as the apostle calls it, for their portion, 1Co_10 16. O sirs! as ever you would prosper and flourish in the world; as ever you would have your water turned into wine, your temporal mercies into spiritual benefits, be much with God in your closets. But,

(3.) Thirdly, I answer, It is ten to one but that the objector every day fools away, or trifles away, or idles away, or sins away—one hour in each day—and why then should he object the lack of time? There are none that toil and moil and busy themselves most in their worldly employments—but do spend an hour or more in a day to little or no purpose, either in gazing about, or in dallying, or toying, or trifling, or in telling of stories, or in busying themselves in other men's matters, or in idle visits, or in smoking the pipe, etc. And why then should not these men redeem an hour's time in a day for private prayer, out of that time which they usually spend so vainly and idly? Can you, notwithstanding all your great worldly employments, find an hour in the day to catch flies in, as Domitian the emperor did? and to play the fool in? and cannot you find an hour in the day to wait on God in your closets?

There were three special faults whereof Cato professed himself to have seriously repented one was, traveling by water when he might have gone by land; another was, trusting a secret in a woman's bosom; but the main was, spending an hour unprofitably. This heathen will one day rise up in judgment against them who, notwithstanding their great employments, spend many hours in a week unprofitably, and yet cry out that they have so much to do on earth, that they have no time to look up to heaven.

It was a base and sordid spirit in that King Sardanapalus, who spent much of his time among women in knitting and playing cards, which should have been spent in ruling and governing his kingdom. So it is a base sordid spirit in any, to spend any of their time in toying and trifling, and then to cry out, that they have so much business to do in the world, that they have no time for closet-prayer, they have no time to serve God, nor to save their own precious and immortal souls. But,

(4.) Fourthly, I answer, No man dares plead this objection before the Lord Jesus in the great day of account, Ecc_11 9; Rom_14 10; 2Co_5 10. And why then should any man be so childish and foolish, so ignorant and impudent to plead that before men, which is not pleadable before the judgment-seat of Christ. O sirs! as you love your souls, and as you would be happy forever, never put off your own consciences nor others' with any pleas, arguments, or objections now, that you dare not own and stand by, when you shall lie upon a dying bed, and when you shall appear before the whole court of heaven, etc. In the great day of account, when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest, and God shall call men to a reckoning before angels, men, and devils, for the neglect of private prayer; all guilty people will be found speechless there will not be a man or woman found, who shall dare to stand up and say, "Lord, I would have waited upon you in my closet—but that I had so much business to do in the world, that I had no time to enjoy secret communion with you in a corner." It is the greatest wisdom in the world, to plead nothing by way of excuse in this our day, that we dare not plead in the great day. But,

(5.) Fifthly, I answer, That it is our duty to redeem time from all our secular businesses for private prayer. All sorts of Christians, whether bond or free, rich or poor, high or low, superiors or inferiors, are expressly charged by God to redeem time for prayer, for private prayer, as well as for other holy exercises Col_4 2-3, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains"

But here some may object and say, We have so much business to do in the world that we have no time for prayer. The apostle answers this objection in Col_4 5, "Walk in wisdom towards those who are without, redeeming the time." So Eph_5 16, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil;" or buying out, or gaining the time. The words are a metaphor taken from merchants, who prefer the least profit that may be gained, before their pleasures or delights, closely following their business while the markets are at best. A merchant when he comes to a mart or fair, takes the first season and opportunity of buying his commodities; he puts it not off to the hazard of an evening, or to the next morning, in hopes to have a better bargain—but he improves the present season, and buys before the market is over.

Others carry the words thus "Purchase at any rate all occasions and opportunities of doing good, that so you may thereby, in some sort, redeem that precious jewel of time which you have formerly lost." As travelers who have loitered by the way, or stayed long at their inn, when they find night coming upon them, they mend their pace, and go as many miles in an hour as they did before in many. Though time let slip is physically irrecoverable—yet in a moral consideration, it is accounted as regained, when men double their care, diligence, and endeavors to redeem it. **The best Christian is he who is the greatest monopolizer of time for private prayer.** No Christian can be compared to him who redeems time from his worldly occasions and his lawful comforts and recreations, to be with God in his closet.

David having tasted of the sweetness, goodness, and graciousness of God, cannot keep his bed—but will borrow some time from his sleep, that he might take some turns in paradise, and pour out his soul in prayer and praises, when no eye was open to see him, nor no ear open to hear him—but all were asleep round about him, Psa_63 6. Psa_119 62, "At midnight will I arise to give thanks unto you." Psa_119 147, "I rise before dawn and cry for help. " David was up and at private prayer before daybreak. David was no sluggish Christian, no slothful Christian, no lazy Christian; he was accustomed to be in his closet when others were sleeping in their beds. So Psa_119 148, "My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises." So Psa_130 6, "My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning; I say, more than those who watch for the morning." Look! as the weary sentinel in a dark, cold, wet night, waits and peeps, and peeps and waits for the appearance of the morning; so David did wait and peep, and peep and wait for the first and fittest season to pour out his soul before God in a corner. David would never allow his worldly business to jostle out holy exercises; he would often borrow time from the world for private prayer—but he would never borrow time from private prayer to bestow it upon the world.

Mr. Bradford, the martyr, counted that hour lost wherein he did not some good, either with his pen, tongue, or purse.

Ignatius, when he heard a clock strike, would use to say, "Now I have one hour more to answer for."

So the primitive Christians would redeem some time from their sleep, that they might be with God in their closets, as Clemens observes.

And I have read of Theodosius the emperor, that after the variety of worldly employments relating to his civil affairs in the day time were over, how he was accustomed to consecrate the greatest part of the night to the studying of the Scriptures and private prayer; to which purpose he had a lamp so artificially made, that it supplied itself with oil, that so he might no way be interrupted in his private retirements.

That time ought to be redeemed, is a lesson that has been taught by the very heathens themselves. It was the saying of Pittacus, one of the seven wise men, "Know time, lose not a minute." And so Theophrastus used to say, that "Time is of precious cost." And so Seneca "**Time is the only thing**," says he, "**that we can innocently be covetous of; and yet there is nothing of which many are more lavishly and profusely wasteful**." And Chrestus always counted time so precious, that when he had misspent his time all the day, he would redeem it at night.

When Titus Vespasian, who revenged Christ's blood on Jerusalem, returned victor to Rome, remembering one night as he sat at supper with his friends, that he had done no good that day, he uttered this memorable and praiseworthy apophthegm, "My friends, I have lost a day."

Chilo, one of the seven sages, being asked what was the hardest thing in the world to be done, answered, "To use and employ a man's time well."

Cato held, that an account must be given, not only of our labor—but also of our leisure. And Elian gives this testimony of the Lacedemonian, "that they were hugely covetous of their time, spending it all about necessary things, and allowing no citizen either to be idle or play." And, says another, "We trifle with that which is most precious, and throw away that which is our greatest interest to redeem."

Certainly, these heathens will rise in judgment, not only against Domitian the Roman emperor, who spent much of his time in killing of flies; nor only against Archimedes, who spent his time in drawing lines on the ground when his country was taken captive; nor against Artaxerxes, who spent his time in carving handles for knives; nor only against Solyman the great Turk, who spent his time in making notches of horn for bows; nor only against Eropas, a Macedonian king, who spent his time in making of lanthorns; nor only against Hyrcanus the king of Parthia who spent his time in catching of moles; but also against many Christian professors who, instead of redeeming of precious time, do trifle and fool away much of their precious time at the mirror, the comb, the lute, the violin, the pipe, or at vain sports, and foolish pastimes, or by idle jestings, immoderate sleeping, and superfluous feasting, etc. O sirs! good hours, and blessed opportunities for closet prayer, are merchandise of the highest rate and price; and therefore, whoever has a mind to be rich in grace, and to be high in glory, should buy up that merchandise, they should be still a-redeeming precious time. O sirs! we should redeem time for private prayer out of our eating time, our drinking time, our sleeping time, our buying time, our selling time, our sinning time, our sporting time, rather than neglect our closet communion with God, etc. But,

(6.) Sixthly, I answer, Closet prayer is either a duty or it is no duty. Now that it is a duty, I have so strongly proved, I suppose, that no man nor devil can fairly or honestly deny it to be a duty. And therefore, why do men cry out of their great business? Alas! duty must be done whatever business is left undone; duty must be done, or the man who neglects it will be undone forever. It is a vain thing to object business, when a required duty is to be performed; and, indeed, if the bare objecting of business, of much business, were enough to excuse men from duty, I am afraid that there are but few duties of the gospel—but men would endeavor to evade under a pretense of business, of much business. He who pretends business to evade private prayer, will be as ready to pretend business to evade family prayer; and he who pretends business to evade family prayer, will be as ready to pretend business to evade public prayer.

Well, sirs! remember what became of those who excused themselves out of heaven, by their carnal apologies, and secular businesses Luk_14 16-24. "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come." The true reason why they would not come to the supper that the King of kings had invited them to, was not because they had bought farms and oxen—but because their farms and oxen had bought them. The things of the world and their carnal relations had taken up so much room in their hearts and affections, that they had no stomach to heaven's dainties; and therefore it is observable what Christ adds at the end of the parable, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Luk_14 26-27. By these words, it is evident, that it was not simply the farm nor the oxen, nor the wife—but a foolish, inordinate, carnal love and esteem of these things, above better and greater blessings, that made them refuse the gracious invitation of Christ. They refused the grace and mercy of God offering in the gospel, under a pretense of worldly business; and God peremptorily concludes, that not a man of them should taste of his supper. And indeed what can be more just and righteous, than that they should never so much as taste of spiritual and eternal blessings, who prefer their earthly business before heaven's dainties; who, with the Reubenites, prefer a country commodious for the feeding of their cattle, before an interest in the land of promise.

Private prayer is a work of absolute necessity, both to the bringing of the heart into a good frame, and to the keeping of the heart in a good frame. It is of absolute necessity, both for the discovery of sin, and for the preventing of sin, and for the embittering of sin, and for the weakening of sin, and for the purging away of sin. It is of absolute necessity, both for the discovery of grace, and for a full exercise of grace, and for an eminent increase of grace. It is of absolute necessity to arm us, both against inward and outward temptations, afflictions, and sufferings. It is of absolute necessity to fit us for all other duties and services, etc. For a man to glorify God, to save his own soul, and to further his own everlasting happiness, is a work of the greatest necessity.

Now private prayer is such a work; and therefore why should any man plead business, great business, when a work of such absolute necessity is before him? If a man's child or wife were dangerously sick, or wounded, or near to death, he would never plead, "I have business, I have a great deal of business to do, and therefore I cannot stay with my child, my wife; and I have no time to go or send to the physician," etc. Oh no! but he would rather argue thus "It is absolutely necessary that I should look after the preservation of the life of my child, my wife, and this I will attend, whatever becomes of my business." O sirs! your souls are of greater concernment to you than the lives of all the wives and children in the world; and therefore these must be attended, these must be saved, whatever business is neglected. But,

(7.) Seventhly, I answer, That God did never appoint or design any man's ordinary, particular calling to thrust private prayer out of door. That it is a great sin for any professor to neglect his particular calling under any religious pretense, is evident enough by these scriptures Exo_20 9, "Six days shall you labor, and do all your work;" 1Co_7 20, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called;" 2Th_3 10-12, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all—but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread;" 1Th_4 11-12, "And that you study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that you may walk honestly toward those who are outside, and that you may have lack of nothing;" Eph_4 28, "But rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him who needs;" 1Ti_5 8, "But if any provides not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Yes, our Lord Jesus Christ was a plain downright carpenter, and was laborious in that particular calling until he entered upon the public ministry, as all the ancients do agree, Mar_6 3; Mat_13 55-56. And we read also that all the patriarchs had their particular callings. Abel was a keeper of sheep, Gen_4 2; Noah was a farmer, Gen_5 29; the sons of Jacob were shepherds and keepers of cattle, Gen_46 34, etc.; and all the apostles, before they were called to the work of the ministry, had their particular callings.

By the law of Mahomet, the great Turk himself is bound to exercise some manual trade or occupation.

Solon made a law, that the son should not be bound to relieve his father when old, unless he had set himself in his youth to some occupation. And at Athens, every man gave a yearly account to the magistrate by what trade or course of life he maintained himself, which, if he could not do, he was banished. And it is by all writers condemned as a very great vanity in Dionysius, who would needs be the best poet; and Caligula, who would needs be the best orator; and in Nero, who would needs be the best fiddler; and so became the three worst princes, by minding more other men's business than their own particular calling.

But for a man to evade or neglect private prayer under pretense of his particular calling, is agreeable to no scripture, yes, it is contrary to very many scriptures, as is evident by the many arguments formerly cited. Certainly no man's calling is a calling away from God or godliness. It never entered into the heart of God that our particular callings should ever drive out of doors our general calling of Christianity. Look! as our general calling must not eat up our particular calling, so our particular calling must not eat up our general calling. Certainly our particular calling must give place to our general calling. Did not the woman of Samaria leave her waterpot, and run into the city, and say, "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did is not this the Christ?" Joh_4 28-29. Did not the shepherds leave their flocks in the field, and go to Bethlehem, and declare the good tidings of great joy that they had heard of the angel, namely, "That there was born that day, in the city of David, a Savior, who was Christ the Lord"? Luk_2 8-21. And did not Christ commend Mary for that holy neglect of her particular calling, when she sat at his feet, and heard his word? Luk_10 38, et seq. And what do all these instances show—but that our particular callings must give the right hand to the general calling of Christianity?

Certainly the works of our general calling are far more great and glorious, more eminent and excellent, more high and noble—than the works of our particular callings are; and therefore it is much more tolerable for our general calling to borrow time from our particular calling, than it is for our particular calling to borrow time from our general nailing. Certainly those men are very ignorant or very profane, who either think themselves so closely tied up to follow their particular callings six days in the week, as that they must not intermeddle with any pious services, or who think their particular callings to be a gulf or a grave designed by God to swallow up private prayer in.

God, who is the Lord of time, has reserved some part of our time to himself every day. Though the Jews were commanded to labor six days of the week—yet they were commanded also to offer up morning and evening sacrifice daily, Deu_6 6-8; Exo_29 38-39; Num_28 3. The Jews divided the day into three parts

The first, time for prayer.

The second, time for the reading of the Scriptures.

And the third, time for the works of their lawful callings.

As bad as the Jews were—yet every day they set a part of the day apart for religious exercises. Certainly they are worse than Jews, who spend all their time about their particular callings, and shut closet-prayer quite out of doors. Certainly that man's soul is in a very ill case, who is so entangled with the incumbrances of the world, that he can spare no time for private prayer. If God is the Lord of your mercies, the Lord of your time, and the Lord of your soul, how can you, with any equity or honor, put off his service under a pretense of much business? That man is lost, that man is cursed, who can find time for anything—but none to meet with God in his closet. That man is doubtless upon the brink of ruin, whose worldly business eats up all thoughts of God, of Christ, of heaven, of eternity, of his soul, and of his soul concernments. But,

(8.) Eighthly, and lastly, I answer, The more worldly business lies upon your hand, the more need have you to keep close to your closet. Much business lays a man open to many sins, and to many snares, and to many temptations. Now, the more sins, snares, and temptations a man's business lays him open to, the more need that man has to be much in private prayer, that his soul may be kept pure from sin, and that his foot may not be taken in the devil's trap, and that he may stand fast in the hour of temptation. Private prayer is so far from being a hindrance to a man's business, that it is the way of ways to bring down a blessing from heaven upon a man's business, Psa_1 2-3; Psa_127 1-2; Psa_128 1-2; as the first fruits that God's people gave to him brought down a blessing from heaven upon all the rest, Deu_26 10-11. Prayer and provender never hinder a journey.

Private prayer is like to Jacob, which brought down a blessing from heaven upon all that Laban had, Gen_30 27; Gen_30 30. **Private prayer gives a man a sanctified use, both of all his earthly comforts, and of all his earthly business**; and this David and Daniel found by experience and therefore it was not their great public employments which could take them off from their private duties. **Time spent in heavenly employments, is no time lost from worldly business**, Deu_28 1-8. Private prayer makes all we take in hand successful. Closet-prayer has made many rich—but it never made any man poor or beggarly in this world.

No man on earth knows what may be the emergencies, or the occurrences of a day Pro_27 1, "Boast not yourself of tomorrow, for you know not what a day may bring forth." Every day is as it were a great-bellied day; every day is as it were with child of something—but what it will bring forth, whether a cross or a comfort, no man can tell; as while a woman is with child, no man can tell what kind of birth it will be. No man knows what mercies a day may bring forth, no man knows what miseries a day may bring forth; no man knows what good a day may bring forth, no man knows what evil a day may bring forth; no man knows what afflictions a day may bring forth, no man knows what temptations a day may bring forth; no man knows what liberty a day may bring forth, no man knows what bonds a day may bring forth; no man knows what success a day may bring forth, no man knows what failure a day may bring forth; and therefore, a man had need be every day in his closet with God, that he may be prepared and fitted to entertain and improve all the occurrences, successes, and emergencies that may attend him in the course of his life. And let thus much suffice for answer to this first objection. But,

Objection 2. Secondly, Others may object and say, Sir, we grant that private prayer is an indispensable duty which lies upon the people of God; but we are servants, and we have no time that we can call our own, and our master's business is such as will not allow us any time for private prayer, and therefore we hope we may be excused.

Solution (1.) First, The text is all inclusive, and not limited to any sort or rank of people, whether high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, servant or master. "But you, when you pray, enter into your closet; and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret." Here are three yous—you, you, you—which are to be understood as all inclusive. You servant as well as you master, you bondman as well as you freeman, you poor man as well as you rich man, you maid as well as you mistress, you child as well as you father, you wife as well as you husband. Private prayer is an indispensable duty, which lies upon all sorts and ranks of people. A man may as well say that that pronoun *you*, that runs through the ten commandments—Exo_20 3-18, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make unto you any engraved image. You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Six days shall you labor. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's," etc.—relates to the rich, and not to the poor, to masters and not to servants, to the free and not to those who are in bonds, etc., as he may say, that the three yous in the text relates to the rich and not to the poor, to masters and not to servants, to those who are free but not to those who are bound; but certainly there is no man in his wits that will say so, that will affirm such a thing. Doubtless this pronoun you reaches every man, of whatever rank or place he is in this world. But,

(2.) Secondly, I answer, That the first, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, and the eighth answers that are given to the first objection, are here very applicable; and oh that all masters and servants were so wise, so serious, and so ingenuous, as to lay all those answers warm on their own hearts! It might be a means to prevent much sin, and to bespeak masters and mistresses to give their pious servants a little more time to lift up their hearts to Christ in a corner. But,

(3.) Thirdly, I answer, If you are a servant that have liberty to choose a new master, you were better remove your station than live under such a master's roof, who is such an enemy to God, to Christ, to true religion, to himself, and to the eternal welfare of your poor soul—as that he will not give you half an hour's time in a day to spend in your chamber, your closet; though the glory of God, the good of his own family, and the everlasting happiness of your own soul, is concerned in it, Psa_84 10; Psa_120 5. It is better for you to shift your master, than to neglect your duty 1Co_7 21, Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you--although if you can gain your freedom, do so."

Laban's house was full of idols. Great houses are often so. Jacob's tent was little—but the true worship of God was in it. It is infinitely better to live in Jacob's tent, than in Laban's house. It is best being with such masters where we may have least of sin, and most of God; where we may have the most helps, the best examples, and the choicest encouragements to be holy and happy.

The pious servant should be as careful in the choice of his master, as the pious master is careful in the choice of his servant. Gracious servants are great blessings to the families where they live; and that master may well be called the unhappy master, who will rather part with a gracious servant, than spare him a little time in a day to pour out his soul before the Lord in a corner. But,

(4.) Fourthly, I answer, If you are a gracious servant, then you are spirited and principled by God, to this very purpose, that you may cry, 'Abba, Father!' when you are alone, when you are in a corner, and no eye sees you—but his who sees in secret, Rom_8 15; Gal_4 6; 1Co_6 19; 2Ti_1 14. If you are a gracious servant, then you have received not the spirit of the world—but the Spirit who is of God, 1Co_2 12. Now, he who has this tree of life, he has also the fruit that grows upon this tree Gal_5 22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," etc. Now, grace is called, not the works of the Spirit—but the fruits of the Spirit.

(1.) Because all grace is derived from the Spirit as the fruit is derived from the root. And,

(2.) To note the pleasantness and delightfulness of grace, for what is more pleasant and delightful than sweet and wholesome fruits? Son_4 16; Son_6 2.

(3.) To note the profit and advantage that does redound to those who have the Spirit; for as many grow rich by the fruits of their gardens and orchards, so many grow rich in grace, in holiness, in comfort, in spiritual experiences, by the fruits of the Spirit. Now why has God given you his Spirit, and why has he laid into your soul a stock of supernatural graces—but that you may be every way qualified, disposed, and fitted for private prayer, and to maintain secret communion with God in a corner?

Certainly God never gave any poor servant a talent of gifts, or a talent of grace—but in order to his driving of a secret trade heavenward.

(5.) Fifthly, I answer, Though king Darius had made a decree that none should ask any petition of any God or man, for thirty days, upon the penalty of being cast into the den of lions—yet Daniel, who was both a subject and a servant to king Darius, and one upon whose hands the chief and greatest affairs of the kingdom did lie, kept up his private devotions. In Dan_6 1-2, you will find that Daniel had abundance of great and weighty employments upon his hands; he was set over the whole affairs of the whole empire of Persia, and he with two other presidents, of whom himself was chief, were to receive the accounts of the whole kingdom from all those hundred and twenty princes, which in the Persian monarchy were employed in all public businesses. And yet, notwithstanding such a multiplicity of business as lay upon his hands, and notwithstanding his servile condition—yet he was very careful to redeem time for private prayer; yes, it is very observable that the heart of Daniel, in the midst of all his mighty businesses, was so much set upon private prayer, upon his secret retirements for religions exercises, that he runs the hazard of losing all his honors, profits, pleasures, yes, and life itself, rather than he would be deprived of convenient time and opportunities to wait upon God in his chamber. Certainly Daniel will one day rise in judgment against all those subjects and servants who think to evade private prayer by their pleas of much business, and of their being servants, etc. But,

(6.) Sixthly, I answer, If you who are gracious servants, notwithstanding your masters' businesses, cannot redeem a little time to wrestle with God in a corner, what singular thing do you do, more than others? Do you hear? So do others. Do you read? So do others. Do you follow your masters to public prayers? So do others. Do you join with your masters in family prayers? So do others. Oh! but now gracious servants should go beyond all other servants in the world, they should do singular things for God Mat_5 47, What do you do, more than others?" That is, 'What extraordinary thing do you do? What more ordinary than to find servants follow their masters to public prayers and to family prayers? Oh! but now to find poor servants to redeem a little time from their masters' business to pour out their souls before the Lord in a corner—this is not ordinary, yes, this is extraordinary, and this does wonderfully well befit gracious servants. Oh! that all men's servants, who are servants to the most high God, would seriously consider,

[1.] How singularly they are privileged by God above all other servants in the world. They are called, adopted, reconciled, pardoned, justified before the throne of God, which other servants are not, etc., 1Co_3 22-23. And why then should not such servants be singular in their services, who are so singular in their privileges?

[2.] Secondly, Gracious servants are made partakers of a more excellent nature than other servants are. 2Pe_1 4, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be made partakers of the divine nature." The apostle in this expression does not aim at any essential change and conversion of our substance into the nature of God and Christ—but only at the elevation and dignifying of our nature by Christ. Though that real, that near, that dear, that choice, that mysterious, that peculiar, that singular, union that Christians have with Christ, does raise them up to a higher similitude and likeness of God and Christ; yet it does not introduce any real transmutation, either of our bodies or souls, into the divine nature. It is certain that our union and communion does enjoin our affections, and brings our wills into a league of amity with Christ. To be made partaker of the divine nature notes two things, say some.

First, A fellowship with God in his holiness.

Secondly, A fellowship with God in his blessedness, namely, in the beatifical vision and brightness of glory. To be made "partakers of the divine nature," say others, is to be made partakers of those holy graces, those divine qualities, which sometimes are called, "the image of God, the likeness of God, the life of God," etc., Eph_4 24; Col_3 10, whereby we resemble God, not only as a picture does a man in outward lineaments—but as a child does his father in countenance and nature. Now, take the words which ever way you will, how highly does it concern those servants, who are made partakers of the divine nature, to do singular things for God, to do such things for God, that other servants, who are not partakers of the divine nature, have no mind, no heart, no spirit to do! yes, that they refuse and scorn to do!

[3.] Thirdly, Gracious servants are worthily descended; they have the most illustrious extraction and honorable original, 1Jn_5 19; Joh_3 8; Jas_2 5.

[4.] Fourthly, Gracious servants are worthily attended, they are nobly guarded; Psa_34 15; Heb_1 14; Deu_33 26-27; Zec_2 5.

[5.] Fifthly, Gracious servants are worthily dignified; they are dignified with the highest and most honorable titles, 1Pe_1 2; 1Pe_1 9; Rev_1 5-6; Rev_5 10.

[6.] Sixthly, Take many things in one gracious servants have more excellent graces, experiences, comforts, communions, promises, assurances, discoveries, hopes, helps, principles, nourishment, raiment, portion—than all other servants in the world have; and therefore God may well expect better and greater things from them, than from all other servants in the world. God may very well expect that they should do singular things for his glory, who has done such singular things for their good. Certainly God expects that gracious servants should be a-blessing of him, when other servants are a-blaspheming of him; that they should be a-magnifying of him, when other servants are a-debasing of him; that **they should be a-redeeming of precious time, when other servants are a-trifling, fooling, playing or sinning away of precious time**; that they should be a-weeping in a corner, when other servants are a-sporting and making themselves merry among their jovial companions; that they should be a-mourning in secret, when other servants are a-sinning in secret; and that they should be at their private devotion, when other servants are sleeping and sporting, etc.

Solomon, who was the wisest prince who ever sat upon a throne, and who was guided by an infallible Spirit, has delivered it for a standing maxim above two thousand years ago, "that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor," Pro_12 26. When Solomon dropped this aphorism from his royal pen, there was not a man in the world that was *legally* righteous; Adam and all his posterity being fallen from all their honor, glory, dignity, and excellency, into a most woeful gulf of sin and misery; and therefore Solomon must be understood of him who is *evangelically* righteous, Psa_14 1-3; Rom_3 9-12; Lam_5 16. He who is evangelically righteous, be he master or servant, rich or poor, bond or free, high or low, is more excellent than his neighbor. And oh that all masters would seriously consider of this, that they may carry it no more so proudly, so loftily, so scornfully, so forwardly, so strangely, so sourly, so bitterly, so rigorously, towards their pious servants, as not to afford them a little time to pour out their souls before the Lord in a corner!

I have read of Ingo, an ancient king of the Draves and Veneds, who, making a stately feast, appointed all his pagan nobles to sit in the hall below; and at the same time commanded certain poor Christians to be brought up into his presence-chamber, to sit with him at his table, that they might eat of his kingly cheer; at which many wondering, he told them, that he accounted Christians, though never so poor, a greater ornament at his table, and more worthy of his company, than the greatest nobles that were not converted to the Christian faith; for says he, when these pagan nobles shall he thrust down to hell, these poor Christians shall be my consorts and fellow-princes in heaven. Certainly, this noble prince will one day rise in judgment against all sour, churlish Labans, who behave so harshly and so severely towards their gracious servants, as that they will not allow them a little time to wait upon God in private devotions, Eph_6 9.

Why should not gracious masters give their gracious servants a little time for closet prayer now, considering that they are sharers with them in all the fundamental good which comes by Christ in this world; and considering that they shall be partakers with them in all the glory of another world? The poorest servant in a family has a soul more precious than heaven and earth; and the greatest work that lies upon his hand in this world, is to look to the eternal safety and security of that for if his soul is safe, all is safe; if that is well, all is well; but if that is lost, all is lost. Every gracious servant, though he be ever so poor and illiterate—yet has he the image of God, the image of the King of kings stamped upon him; and woe to him who shall wrong, or despise, or trample upon that image! Certainly, God himself is wronged by the injury which is done to his image. The contempt and despite which is done to the image of a king, is done to the king himself; and accordingly he will revenge it.

If it was a capital crime in Tiberius his days, to carry the image of Augustus upon a ring or coin into any sordid place; what crime must it be in those masters who despise, revile, reproach, scorn, abuse, and tread under foot, such servants as have the image of the great God stamped upon their souls, and all because they look Godward, Christ-ward, heavenward, holiness-ward, duty-ward? Masters should never ridicule their servants, for their inferiority, poverty, misery, low parentage, or servile condition; but remember that these things are more the Creator's pleasure than the servant's fault, and that that God who has made the master rich and the servant poor, can as quickly make the master poor and the servant rich, Pro_22 2; Pro_17 5. God many times puts down the mighty from their seats, and exalts those of low degree, Luk_1 52. Certainly, no master nor mistress should dare to insult or gloat over such servants as have souls as noble as their own; but they should seriously and frequently consider of Solomon's aphorism, "The righteous, though a servant," though the lowest among all the servants, "is more excellent than his neighbor," and accordingly give them a little time and liberty to converse with God in secret.

And oh, that all gracious servants would discover themselves to be more excellent than their neighbors, by making more conscience of private prayer than their neighbors do, and by being more in their closets than their neighbors are, and by delighting themselves in their secret retirements more than their neighbors will, and by redeeming some time for God, for their souls, and for eternity, more than their neighbors do. But,

(7.) Seventhly, I answer, That God alone, is the Lord of time. [Hab_2 8; Dan_11 27; Dan_11 29; Dan_11 35; Job_7 1; Psa_102 13; Ecc_3 1; Dan_2 21; Isa_60 22; Job_14 14] Time is more the Lord's than it is your master's; and therefore it is no neglecting of your master's business, to take a little time daily for private prayer. Times do belong to God's providence; and as God is the God of our mercies, so he is the Lord of our times "My times are in your hands," says David, Psa_31 15. Not only the times of his sorrows—but also the times of his comforts; not only the times of his miseries—but also the times of his mercies; not only the times of his dangers—but also the times of his duties, were in the hands of God.

It is observable the Psalmist does not say time—but times, in the plural, to show that every point and period of time depends upon the hand of God.

That servant that borrows a little time every day to seek the face of God in a corner, borrows it rather of God than of his master; and therefore why should his master swell, or rage, or complain, considering that God never made him Lord of time? But,

(8.) Eighthly, I answer, That servants should rather redeem time from their sleep, their recreations, their daily meals—than neglect closet-duty a day. And certainly those servants that, out of conscience towards God, and out of a due regard to the internal and eternal welfare of their own souls, shall every day redeem an hour's time from their sleep, or sports, or meals, to spend with God in secret, they shall find by experience that the Lord will make a few hours' sleep sweeter and better than many hours' sleep to them; and their outward sports shall be made up with inward delights; and for their common bread, God will feed them with that bread which came down from heaven.

Sirs, was not Christ his Father's servant? Isa_42 1. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my elect (or choice one), in whom my soul delights" (or is well pleased)! "I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." And did not he redeem time from his natural rest, rather than he would omit private prayer? Mar_1 35, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." Christ spent the day in preaching, in healing the sick, in working of miracles; and rather than these noble works should shut out private prayer, he rises a great while before day, that he might have some time to wrestle with his Father in secret. So Luk_6 12, "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." O sirs! did Christ spend whole nights in private prayer for the salvation of your souls; and will you think it much to redeem an hour's time from your natural rest to seek and to serve him in a corner, and to make sure the things of your everlasting peace?

The redeeming of time for private prayer is the redeeming of a precious treasure, which, if once lost, can never fully be recovered again. If riches should make themselves wings, and fly away, they may return again, as they did to Job; or if credit, and honor, and worldly greatness and renown, should fly away, they may return again, as they did to Nebuchadnezzar; if success, and famous victories and conquests, should make themselves wings, and fly away, they may return again, as they did to many of the Roman conquerors and others; but if time, whom the poets paint with wings, to show the volubility and swiftness of it, fly from us, it will never more return unto us!

Queen Elizabeth, on her dying bed cried out, "Call time again, call time again; a world of wealth for an inch of time!" but time past was never, nor could never be recalled.

The Egyptians drew the picture of time with three heads.

The first was of a greedy wolf gaping for time past, because it has ravenously devoured even the memory of so many things past recalling.

The second of a crowned lion roaring for time present, because it has the principality of all action, for which it calls aloud.

And the third was of a deceitful dog, fawning for time to come, because it feeds fond men with many flattering hopes, to their eternal undoing. Oh that all this might prevail with servants to redeem time for private prayer! And if my counsel might take place, I should rather advise servants to redeem some time for private prayer from their sleep or lawful recreations, or set meals, etc., than to spend in private prayer that time which their masters call their time, especially if their masters be unconverted, and in "the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity;" and that for these five reasons.

[1.] First, Because this may be a means to prevent much sin on the master's side. Masters that are in their unregenerate estate are very apt to storm, and let fly against God, and Christ, and true religion, etc., when they see their servants spend that time in private prayer, or in any other pious exercise, which, according to their understanding, is their time, and ought to be wholly spent in following their businesses. Now gracious servants should have that honorable respect, and that tender affection, and that Christian compassion to their masters' souls—as to do to the utmost all that lies in them to prevent their masters from contracting guilt upon their souls, or from making work for repentance, for hell.

The Persians, the Turks, and many Indians are so compassionate, that they erect hospitals not only for lame and diseased men—but also for birds, beasts, and dogs that are either aged, starved, or hurt. Oh then, what tender compassions should gracious servants exercise towards their masters' souls, which are jewels more worth than heaven and earth! But,

[2.] Secondly, Because this may be a means to convince the judgments and consciences of their masters, that there is some worth, some excellency, some sweetness, etc., to be found in private prayer, and in other closet-duties; for when masters shall observe their servants to redeem time for closet duties, from their very sleep, recreations, dinners, suppers, they will be ready to conclude, that certainly there is more worth, more goodness, more sweetness, more excellency, more glory, more gain in closet duties, than ever they have understood, felt, or experienced, etc., and that their very poor servants are better and more righteous than themselves. Sozomen reports, that the devout life of a poor captive Christian woman, made a king and all his family embrace the faith of Jesus Christ. **Godly lives convince more than miracles themselves.**

I have read of one Pachomius, a soldier under Constantine the emperor, how that his army being almost starved for want of necessary provision, he came to a city of Christians, and they of their own charity relieved them speedily and freely; he wondering at their free and noble charity, inquired what kind of people they were whom he saw so bountiful? It was answered that they were Christians, whose profession it is to hurt no man, and do good to every man. Hereupon Pachomius, convinced of the excellency of this religion, threw away his weapons, and became a Christian, a saint. Look as husbands sometimes are won by the lives of their wives without the word, 1Pe_3 1-2; so masters may sometimes be won by the gracious carriage and lives of their servants, without the word. The servant's redeeming of time for private duties, upon the hardest and severest terms, may be so blessed to the master, that it may issue in his conviction, conversion, and salvation. There is a *perhaps* for it; and a very *perhaps* should be a sufficient encouragement for every gracious servant to do all he can to save the soul of his master from going down into the infernal pit. But,

[3.] Thirdly, Because the servant's redeeming of time from his sleep, recreations, meals, for private prayer, will most clearly and abundantly evidence the singular love, the great delight, and the high esteem that he has of private prayer. We say those children love their books well, and delight much in learning, who will be at their books when others are gone to their beds, and who will be at their books before others can get out of their beds. Certainly they love private prayer well, and they delight much in closet communion with God, who will be a-praying when others are a-sleeping, and who will be a-dressing their souls before God in a corner, before their mistress is a-dressing of herself at the mirror, or their fellow servants a-dressing themselves in the shop. But,

[4.] Fourthly, Because the servant's redeeming of time for private prayer, from his sleep, set meals, recreations, etc., may be of most use to other fellow servants, both to awaken them, and to convince them that the things of true religion are of the greatest and highest importance, and that there is no trade, or pleasure, or profit, compared to that private trade which is driven between God and a man's own soul; and also to keep them from trifling, or fooling away of that time, which is truly and properly their masters' time, and by the royal law of heaven ought to be spent solely and wholly in their service and business. For what sincere servant is there in the world but will argue thus? I see that such and such of my fellow servants will redeem time for private prayer, and for other closet-services, from their very sleep, meals, recreations, etc.; rather than they will borrow, or steal that time which my master says is his, etc.; and why then should I be so foolish, so brutish, so mad, to trifle, or idle, or play, or toy away that time which should be spent in my master's service, and for my master's advantage? But,

[5.] Fifthly, and lastly, Because the servant's redeeming of time for private prayer from his sleep, his meals, his recreations, etc., cannot but be infinitely pleasing to God; and that which will afford him most comfort when he comes to die. The more any poor heart acts contrary to flesh and blood, the more he pleases God; the more any poor heart denies himself, the more he pleases God; the more any poor heart acts against the stream of sinful examples, the more he pleases God; the more difficulties and discouragements a poor heart meets with in the discharge of his duty, the more love he shows to God; and the more love a poor heart shows to God, the more he pleases God Jer_2 2-3, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them." God was very highly pleased and greatly delighted with the singular love and choice affections of his people towards him, when they followed after him, and kept close to him, in that tedious and difficult passage through the waste, howling wilderness.

How all these things do weigh with that poor pious servant who redeems time for private prayer upon the hardest terms imaginable, I shall leave the sincere reader to judge. And certainly, upon a dying bed, no tongue can express, nor heart conceive—but he who feels it, the unspeakable comfort that closet-duties will afford to him who has been exercised in them, upon those hard terms that are under present consideration. But,

(9.) Ninthly, I answer, If you are a gracious servant, then the near and dear **relationship** which is between God and you, and the choice privileges that you are savingly interested in—calls aloud for private prayer, Joh_8 32-33; Joh_8 36. As you are your Master's servant, so you are the Lord's freeman 1Co_7 22-23, "For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men"—either when they command you things forbidden by Christ, or forbid you things commanded by Christ; or when they would exercise a dominion over your faith, or a lordship over your consciences. Do not allow yourselves in spiritual things, to be brought into such bondage by any men or masters in the world, as not to use that freedom and liberty that Christ has purchased for you with his dearest blood, Gal_5 1; Col_2 20; Gal_2 4.

No servants are to serve their masters in opposition to Christ; nor are any servants to serve their masters as spiritual masters; nor are any servants to serve their masters as supreme masters—but as subordinate masters, Eph_6 5-7. And as every gracious servant is the Lord's freeman, so every gracious servant is the Lord's friend, Isa_41 8; Jas_2 23; Joh_15 13-15. And as every gracious servant is the Lord's friend, so every gracious servant is the Lord's son, Gal_4 5-6; Rom_8 16. And as every gracious servant is the Lord's son, so every gracious servant is the Lord's spouse, Hos_2 19-20; 2Co_11 2.

And now I appeal to the consciences of all who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, whether the near and dear relationship which is between the Lord and pious servants does not call aloud upon them to take all opportunities and advantages that possibly they can, to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret, and to acquaint him in a corner with all their secret wants, and weaknesses, and wishes, etc.

And as gracious servants are thus nearly and dearly related to God, so gracious servants are very highly **privileged** by God. Gracious servants are as much freed from the reign of sin, the dominion of sin, and the damnatory power of sin, as gracious masters are, Rom_6 14. Gracious servants are as much freed from hell, from the curse of the law, and from the wrath of God, as their gracious masters are, Rom_8 1. Gracious servants are as much adopted, as much reconciled, as much pardoned, as much justified, and as much redeemed, as their gracious masters are, Gal_3 13. Gracious servants are as much heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, as their gracious masters are. [1Th_1 10; Col_3 11; Gal_5 6; Rom_8 17; Gal_6 14; 1Pe_2 9] Gracious servants are as much a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, called out of darkness into his marvelous light, as their gracious masters are. And therefore they being all alike interested in all these great and glorious privileges which belong to saints as saints, they are, without all question, alike obliged and engaged to all those duties which lies upon saints as saints, among which private prayer is one; and therefore they are to buckle to this duty against all carnal reasons and objections whatever. But,

(10.) Tenthly, and lastly, I answer, that the promised **reward** in the text lies as fair and as open to the servant as to the master, to the bond as to the free, to the peasant as to the prince. Whoever prays to his heavenly Father in secret, be he high or low, rich or poor, honorable or lowly, servant or master—he shall receive an open reward. The reward in the text is not to be confined or limited to this or that sort or rank of men—but it is to be extended to all ranks and sorts of men that make conscience of private prayer, of closet duties. So Eph_6 5-8, "Servants, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free." Col_3 22-24, "Servants, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Such servants as serve their masters faithfully, cordially, and in singleness of spirit, shall receive the reward of grace and the reward of the inheritance. The lowest servant who is faithful in the service of his master, shall for a recompense receive the eternal inheritance, Rom_8 15-17. The recompense of reward in the scripture last cited is not of merit—but of mere grace, because the inheritance belongs only to children upon the account of their birth or adoption. Faithful servants shall be made sons of God, and so enjoy the heavenly inheritance. Christ is so noble a master, that he will not allow any service which has been performed to men out of conscience to his command, to pass unrewarded. Oh how much more will he recompense pious servants for those spiritual services that they perform for his sake, for his glory? God is so liberal a paymaster, that no man shall so much as shut the door, or kindle a fire upon his altar, or give a cup of cold water—one of the least, readiest, and lowest refreshments that be—but he shall be rewarded, Mal_1 10; Mat_10 42.

It is an excellent observation of Calvin, upon God's rewarding of the Rechabites' obedience, Jer_35 19, "God," says he, "often recompenses the shadows and seeming appearances of virtue, to show that delight which he takes in the ample rewards that he has reserved for true and sincere piety." Nebuchadnezzar, though a tyrant—yet being engaged in God's service against Tyre, he shall have Egypt as his pay, for his pains at Tyre, Eze_29 18-20. It is an ancient slur and slander that has been cast upon God, as if he were an austere master, an illiberal Lord, and as if there were nothing to be gotten in his service but knocks, blows, wounds, crosses, losses, etc.; whereas he is a rewarder, not only of those who diligently seek him—but even of the very worst of men who do any service for him, Heb_11 6.

How much will the King of kings reward all those poor pious servants of his, who do not only give to him in his members cups of cold water—but do also redeem time from their very rest, meals, and recreations, that they may have some time to seek the face of God in a corner. Certainly, there shall not be a sigh, a groan, a prayer, a tear let fall by a poor servant in a corner, which shall not be at last regarded and rewarded by the great God. Lyra says, that Mordecai waited six years, before his good service was rewarded by king Ahasuerus. It may be God may reward you sooner for all your closet services; but if he does not reward you sooner, he will certainly reward you better, he will reward you with higher honors, with greater dignities, with more glorious robes, and with a more royal crown, even an incorruptible crown, a crown of righteousness, a crown of life, a crown of glory, 1 Cor 9 29; 2Ti_4 8; Rev_2 10; Jas_1 12; 1Pe_5 4. And therefore hold on and hold out in your secret retirements. Though some may deride you, and others revile you, and your carnal masters discourage you—yet God is faithful and will certainly reward you; yes, he will openly reward you for all the secret pourings out of your souls in his bosom. But,

07 Six objections stated and answered contd

Objection 3. Some may further object and say, Oh but we cannot pray alone; we lack those gifts and endowments which others have; we are shut up and know not how to pour out our souls before God in a corner; we would willingly pray—but we lack ability to pour out our souls before the Lord in secret, etc.

Solution 1. God's dearest children may sometimes be shut up; they may with Zacharias, for a time, be struck dumb, and not able to speak, Luk_1 20; Psa_77 4. "I am so troubled that I cannot speak," Psa_38 9. "Lord, all my desire is before you and my groaning is not hid from you." God's dearest children have sometimes been so shut up, that they have been able to say nothing, nor to do anything but groan. A child of God may sometimes meet with such a blow from God, from conscience, from Scripture, from Satan, from the world, that may for a time so astonish him, that he may not be able to speak to God, nor speak to others, nor speak to his own heart. Look! as the Holy Spirit is not always a teaching Spirit, nor always a leading Spirit, nor always a comforting Spirit, nor always a sealing Spirit, nor always a witnessing Spirit, nor always an assuring Spirit to any of the saints; so he is not always a supplicating Spirit in any of the saints. When he is grieved, vexed, quenched, provoked—he may suspend his gracious influences, and deny the soul his assistance; and what can a Christian then say or do? But,

[2.] Secondly, I answer, You cannot pray; but can you not sigh? can you not groan? There may be the Spirit of adoption in sighs and groans, as well as in vocal prayer, Rom_8 26. The force, the virtue, the efficacy, the excellency of prayer does not consist in the number and flourish of words—but in the supernatural motions of the Spirit, in sighs, and groans, and pangs, and strong affections of heart, which are unspeakable and unutterable. Certainly, the very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of a man's soul before the Lord, though it be but in sighs, groans, and tears, 1Sa_1 13-19. One sigh and groan from a broken heart, is better pleasing to God, than all human eloquence. But,

[3.] Thirdly, I answer, Beg of God to teach you to pray. Oh beg the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of prayer. God has promised his Holy Spirit to those who ask, Luk_11 13. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Eze_36 26-27. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." Eze_11 19. "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh," Zec_12 10. "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication."

Now gracious promises are God's pledges, and he loves to see his people put them to use. God expects that we should be his remembrancers, and that we should pray over his promises, Isa_62 6-7; Isa_42 25-25. When he had promised great things to his people concerning justification, sanctification, and preservation; he subjoins, "Yet, I will for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it," Eze_36 37. God looks that we should spread his gracious promises before him, as Hezekiah did Sennacherib's letter, Isa_37 14. God is never better pleased than when his people importune him in his own words, and urge him with arguments taken from his own promises. Though God is a very affectionate father, and a very liberal father—yet he is not a wasteful father, for he will never throw away his mercies on such as will not stoutly and humbly plead out his promises with him. God loves to be sought unto, both for his giving of mercies, and for his making good of precious promises.

You say you can not pray; why! can you not go into a corner, and spread the promises last cited before the Lord, and tell him how much it concerns his honor and glory, as well as your own internal and eternal good, to make good those gracious promises that he has made concerning his giving of his Spirit to those who ask him, and his putting his Spirit within them, and his pouring out a Spirit of grace and supplication upon them?

We read of Tamar, Gen_38 18; Gen_38 25, that when Judah her father-in-law lay with her, she took as a pledge his signet, bracelets, and staff; and afterwards, when she was in great distress, and ready to be burnt as an harlot, she then brought out her staff, and signet, and bracelets, and said, "By the man whose these are, am I with child," and thereby she saved her life. The promises of God are as so many rich mines, they are as so many choice flowers of paradise, they are the food, life, and strength of the soul. They are as a staff to support the soul, and they are as jewelry to adorn the soul, and nourishment to enrich the soul; and therefore poor sinners should bring them forth, and lay them before the Lord, and urge God with them, there being no way on earth to save a man's soul, and to prevent a burning in hell, like pleading the promises. Concerning precious promises, let me give you these eight hints.

[1.] First, That they are truly propounded and stated by God, Mar_10 30.

[2.] Secondly, That they shall certainly be performed, 2Co_1 20, they being all made in and through Christ. They are made first to Christ, and then to all who have union and communion with him.

Sirtorius, says Plutarch, paid what he promised with mere fair words; but God pays with performance. Men many times say and unsay; they often eat their words as soon as they have spoken them; but God will never eat the words that are gone out of his mouth Isa_46 10-11, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure yes, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass I have purposed it, I will also do it."

[3.] Thirdly, That they all issue from free grace, from special love, from divine goodness, Hos_14 4.

[4.] Fourthly, That they are all as unchangeable as he is, who made them, Jer_31 3.

[5.] Fifthly, That they are all bottomed and founded upon the truth, faithfulness, and all-sufficiency of God, Mal_3 6.

[6.] Sixthly, That they are pledges of great things that God will do for his people in time, Heb_13 5.

[7.] Seventhly, That they are most sure and certain evidences of divine favor, and a declaration of the heart and goodwill of God to his poor people, Heb_6 12; Num_23 19.

[8.] Eighthly, That they are the price of Christ's blood.

Now how should all these things encourage poor souls to be still a-pressing of God with his promises. But,

[4.] Fourthly, You say you cannot pray, etc. Oh that you would leave off objecting, and fall upon praying. If you cannot pray as you **would**, nor as you **should**, pray as well as you **can**. Joseph's brethren stood so long dallying, and delaying, and trifling out the time, that, having a journey to go to buy grain, they might have bought and returned twice before they went and bought once. When Elijah called Elisha, he must first go bid his father and mother farewell, before he could follow the prophet, 1Ki_19 20. O friends! take heed of dallying, delaying, trifling, and going about the bush, when you should be a-falling upon the work of prayer. What though with Hannah you can but weep out a prayer, or with Moses stammer out a prayer, or with Hezekiah chatter out a prayer—yet do as well as you can, and you shall find acceptance with God 2Co_8 12, "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not."

The *publican's prayer* had not much rhetoric or eloquence in it, "God be merciful to me a sinner," Luk_18 13, and yet God accepted it. He prayed much, though he spoke little, and God did not turn a deaf ear upon him. That God who once accepted a handful of meal for a sacrifice, and a grip of goat's hair for an oblation, and the poor widow's two mites—as if they had been two million; will certainly accept of what you are able to do, though you do fall short, yes, much short, of what you ought to do, Lev_2 1-2, and Lev_6 15; Luk_21 3. "Lord," says Luther, "you command me to pray. I cannot pray as I would—yet I will obey; for though my prayer is not acceptable—yet your own commandment is acceptable to you." If weak Christians would but put forth in prayer that little strength they have, God would quickly renew their spiritual strength; he would certainly carry them on from strength to strength; he would still, by secret assistances and secret influences, help them on in their heavenly trade, Isa_49 20-22; Psa_84 7.

As a loving and caring father will take his little child in his arms, and carry him on in his way homeward, when his strength begins to fail him, and he can walk no further, and the way proves dirty, slippery, or uneven; so does God by his Hos_11 3, "I taught Ephraim also to walk" (as a nurse does the infant), "taking them by their arm." When God's poor children come to a foul way, or a rough place, he takes them up in his own arms, and helps them over the quagmire of crosses, and the difficulties of duties, and over all that straitness, and narrowness, and weakness of spirit which attends them in their closet performances.

It is observable, that when the king of Israel was to shoot the arrow, he did put his hand upon the bow, and Elisha did put his hand upon the king's hand, 2Ki_13 16. So when we go into our closets, we are to put up our hand, and then the Spirit of God likewise will put his hand upon our hand, he will put his strength to our strength, or rather to our weakness Rom_8 26, "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities." The Greek word properly signifies such a help, as when another man of strength and ability steps in to sustain the burden which lies upon our shoulders, be it a log, or a piece of timber, setting his shoulders under it, to lift up, and bear part of it with us; or to help us as the nurse helps her little child, upholding it by the sleeve. When a poor Christian sets himself to closet prayer, or to mourn, or to believe, or to obey, etc.; then the Spirit comes in with new help, and new influences, and new assistances, and so carries him on in all these noble services.

That child that does but stammer at first, in time will speak plainly and fluently. Oh how many Christians are there, who now can pray with much freedom, liberty, and fluency, who at first could only sigh out a prayer, or stammer out a prayer, or weep out a prayer! You say you cannot pray—but did you but stir up yourself to obey that command, Mat_6 6, as well as you can, you do not know but that a power may go forth with the command, that may enable you to act suitable to the command. In Mat_9 1-9, Christ bid the palsied man rise and walk "Take up your bed, and go unto your house." The palsy man might have objected, "Alas! I am carried by four men, I am not able to stir a limb, much less to rise—but least of all to take up my bed and walk, etc." Oh but he rouses up himself as well as he could, and a power went forth with the command, which enabled him to do what was commanded.

So in Mat_12 10-14, there was a poor man who had a withered hand, and Christ commands him to stretch forth his hand; he might have replied, "My hand is withered, and if I might be given a million worlds to stretch it forth, I could not stretch it forth; yes, if my very life, if my very salvation did lie upon stretching forth my withered arm, I could not stretch it forth." Oh! but he throws by all such pleas, and complies with Christ's command as well as he could, and a power went forth and healed his hand.

O sirs! if you would but pray in your closets as well as you can, you do not know but that such a power and virtue might flow from Christ into your hearts, as might carry you on in your closet-duties, beyond expectation, even to admiration; others have found it so, and why not you, why not you? Well! remember, that God is no curious nor critical observer of the poor expressions which fall from his poor children when they are in their closet-duties; he is such a Father as is very well pleased with the broken expressions and flawed stammerings of his people when they pray. It is not a flood of words, nor studied notions, nor seraphical expressions, nor elegant phrases in prayer—which takes the ear, or which delights the heart of God, or which opens the gates of glory, or which brings down the best of blessings upon the soul; but uprightness, holiness, heavenliness, spiritualness, and brokenness of heart these are the things that make a conquest upon God, and bring most benefit to the soul. But,

(5.) Fifthly, You say you cannot pray—but if you are a child of God, you have the Spirit of God—and the Spirit of God is a Spirit of prayer and supplication. That all the children of God have the Spirit of God is most evident in the blessed Scriptures. Take these for a taste Zec_12 10, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication." Rom_8 15, "You have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." 1Co_2 12, "We have received, not the spirit of the world—but the Spirit who is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1Th_4 8, "Who has given unto us his Holy Spirit." 1Jn_3 4, "Hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us." 1Jn_4 13, "Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

That all the children of God have the Spirit of God, may be further made evident by an induction of these seven particulars.

[1.] First, They are all **SANCTIFIED** by the Spirit 1Co_6 11, "You are sanctified by the Spirit of our God." I do not say, that they are all equally sanctified by the Spirit—but I say they are all really sanctified by the Spirit. Though all the servants of Christ have their talents—yet all have not their ten talents, nor all have not their five talents, nor all have not their two talents; some have only their one talent, Mat_25 15. Though Benjamin's portion was five times as much as his brethren's portion—yet everyone of his brethren had their portion, Gen_43 32-34. So, though some Christians have five times more measure of the Spirit, and greater measures of light, of love, of holiness, of heavenly-mindedness, etc., than others have—yet every Christian has some measure of the Spirit, and some measure of grace and holiness, etc. Though some are babes in Christ, and others are children in Christ, though some are young men in Christ, and others old men in Christ—yet everyone of them is born of the Spirit of Christ, 1Pe_2 2; 1Jn_2 12-14; Joh_3 8. Though none of the people of God in this life have the Spirit in perfection—yet every one of them have so much of the Spirit as will bring him to salvation. Every Christian has so much of the Spirit as will bring Christ and his soul together; and therefore without any question, every Christian has so much of the Spirit, as will at last bring heaven and his soul together.

[2.] Secondly, They are all **LED** by the Spirit Rom_8 14, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." Every child of God has a twofold guide the word without, and the Spirit within, Isa_30 20-21. How the Spirit leads by the rule of the word, and how he leads to God, and leads to Christ, and leads to truth, and leads to righteousness, and leads to holiness, and leads to happiness, I shall not now undertake to show, Pro_6 22; Eph_5 9.

[3.] Thirdly, They are all **UPHELD** and **STRENGTHENED** by the Spirit Psa_51 12, "Uphold me with your free Spirit;" or underprop me or sustain me, as the Hebrew has it, with your free, voluntary Spirit; or, as the Greek renders it, with your noble, princely Spirit. So Eph_3 16, "To be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." By the inner man, some understand the regenerate part of man; others, by the inner man, do understand the soul with all its noble faculties and motions. Take the words which way you will, it is certain that all the spiritual might and strength that a Christian has, he has it from the Holy Spirit. Though the Spirit strengthens every Christian in the inner man—yet I do not say that the Spirit strengthens every Christian alike in the inward man. Some have stronger corruptions to subdue than others, and more violent temptations to withstand than others, and greater difficulties to wrestle with than others, and choicer mercies to improve than others, and higher and harder pious duties to manage than others, and accordingly they are more strengthened in the inner man than others.

[4.] Fourthly, They are all **PARTAKERS** of the first fruits of the Spirit Rom_8 23, "We ourselves have the first fruits of the Spirit," which are but as a handful of corn in respect of the whole crop. All the grace and all the holiness which we have from the regenerating Spirit at first conversion is but a drop to that sea, a mite to those talents, which we shall receive in the life to come, 2Co_1 22.

[5.] Fifthly, They are all **TAUGHT** by the Spirit, Joh_14 26. "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things," Isa_59 21. This promise primarily belongs to the apostles. Secondarily, to all believers. Though these words were spoken at first to the apostles only—yet they were not spoken of the apostles only Isa_54 13, "And all your children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of your children." In these words there are three things promised to the **apostles**

First, Immediate illumination by the Spirit of God.

Secondly, A full knowledge of all those truths belonging to their apostolical office, and that were necessary for them at that juncture of time.

Thirdly, Absolute infallibility as to matter of doctrine.

There are also three things promised to all **believers**

First, Mediate illumination, teaching truths by the Spirit of truth, in the use of the means of grace.

Secondly, Knowledge of all truth necessary to salvation.

Thirdly, Infallibility too, so far forth as they adhere and keep close to the Spirit's teaching in the word.

Philo says that the primitive Christians were called tillers, because, as farmers till their fields and fertilize their grounds, so did they teach their families and nurture their children and servants with good instructions. Oh, what choice teachings of the Spirit were these primitive Christians under, who made it so much their business, their work, to teach those who were under their charge, 1Th_4 9; 2Co_3 8. So 1Jn_2 27, "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him." Not that we know all things simply, or that we need not a ministry to teach and instruct us; but he speaks comparatively you shall not be so helped by any instructions without the Spirit, as with the Spirit. The Spirit shall declare the truth as it is in Jesus more clearly, more freely, more particularly, more certainly, more universally, more effectually, than any other is able to do. [1Co_6 9-11; 1Ti_4 1; Joh_16 25; Isa_48 17; Ecc_11 5] The Spirit, this holy unction, shall teach the saints all things; not all things knowable, for that is impossible for finite creatures to attain unto. Who knows the motions of the heavens, the influences of the stars, the nature of the creatures, or how the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child? Who knows the reason why the river Nilus should overflow in the summer, when waters are at the lowest; or why the loadstone should draw iron to it, or incline to the pole star?

Pliny tells us of one that spent fifty-eight years in learning about the nature of the bee, and yet had not fully attained to it. How is it possible, then, for the wisest naturalist to enter into the deep things of God?

Paul, who learned his divinity among the angels, and who had the Holy Spirit for his immediate teacher, tells us plainly that "he knew but *in part*," 1Co_13 9-11; and oh then, how little a part of that part do we know! But the Spirit teaches the saints all things; that is,

First, He teaches them all things needful for the salvation of their souls, all things necessary to bring them to heaven, Joh_17 3.

Secondly, All things needful to life and godliness, 2Pe_1 3.

Thirdly, All things needful to their places, callings, sexes, ages, and conditions.

Fourthly, All things needful for you to know to preserve you in the truth, and to preserve you from being deluded and seduced by those false teachers of whom he speaks, 1Jn_2 10; 1Jn_2 19; 1Jn_2 22-23; 1Jn_2 26. And certainly this is the main thing that John hints at in that expression. The "all things" spoken of in 1Jn_2 27, according to the ordinary Scripture style, must necessarily be interpreted only of all those things which are there spoken of But,

[6.] Sixthly, They are all **COMFORTED** by the Spirit [Joh_14 16; Joh_14 26; Joh_15 26, and Joh_16 7] Act_9 31, They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit;" Rom_14 17, "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink—but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." 1Th_1 6, "And you became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit." Not that all Christians have always actual comfort, actual joy. Oh no! For as the air is sometimes clear and sometimes cloudy, and as the sea is sometimes ebbing and sometimes flowing; so the comforts and joys of the people of God are sometimes ebbing and sometimes flowing, sometimes clear and sometimes cloudy.

Hudson the martyr, and having prayed earnestly, was comforted immediately, and suffered valiantly.

So Mr. Glover the martyr, as he was going to the stake he looked back, and cried out to his friend, "He is come, he is come," meaning the Comforter, and so he laid down his life with joy.

Rachel wept, and would not be comforted; she gave so much way to weeping, that she would not give the least way to comfort; and so it is many times with the choicest saints, "My soul refused to be comforted," Psa_77 2. It is not my purpose at present to insist on the several ways whereby the people of God refuse comfort, and fall short of those strong consolations which God is willing that they should receive. The sun may operate where it does not shine, and a man may be in a state of salvation, and yet lack consolation; a man may fear the Lord, and obey the voice of his servant, and yet walk in darkness and see no light, Isa_50 10. There is no Christian but may sometimes have trouble in his conscience, and grief in his heart, and tears in his eyes, and fears and questionings in his soul—whether God is his Father, and whether Christ is his redeemer, and whether mercy belongs to him, yes, whether any promise in the book of God belongs to him, etc.

Joy and comfort are those dainties, those *sweets* of heaven, which God does not every day feast his people with, Psa_30 6-7; every day is not a wedding day, nor is every day a harvest day, nor is every day a summer day. The fatted calf is not killed every day, nor are the robe and the ring put on every day; nor is every day a festival day or a dancing day, Luk_15 22-23; Ecc_3 4; Rom_12 15. As there is a time to sing, so there is a time to sigh; as there is a time to laugh, so there is a time to weep; and as there is a time to dance, so there is a time to mourn. **All tears will never be totally wiped from our eyes, until all sin is totally taken out of our hearts.**

But notwithstanding all this—yet gracious souls have always sure and choice grounds of consolation; they have the promises, they have the "first fruits of the Spirit," they have union with Christ, and they have right to eternal life—though they have not always sensible comforts. The children of God have always cause to exercise faith and hope in God in their darkest condition, though they have not always actual joy and consolation, Job_13 15; Psa_42 5. *The Comforter always abides with the saints—though he does not always actually comfort the saints*, Joh_1 16. The Spirit many times carries on his sanctifying work in the soul—when he does not carry on his comforting work in the soul; the Spirit many times acts in a way of humiliation—when he does not act in a way of consolation; the Spirit many times fills the soul with godly sorrow—when he does not fill the soul with holy joy. The actings of the Spirit, as to his comforting work, are all of his own sovereign will and pleasure; and therefore he may abide in the soul when he does not actually comfort the soul. But,

[7.] Seventhly, The people of God, first or last, are **SEALED** by the Spirit Eph_1 13, "In whom, after you believed, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise." The nature of sealing consists in the imparting of the image or character of the seal, to the thing sealed. To seal a thing is to stamp the character of the seal on it. Now, the Spirit of God does really and effectually communicate the image of God to us, which image consists in righteousness and true holiness. Then are we truly sealed by the Spirit of God when the Holy Spirit stamps the image of grace and holiness so obviously, so evidently upon the soul, as that the soul sees it, feels it, and can run and read it; then the soul is sealed by the Holy Spirit. So Eph_4 30, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." The person of the Holy Spirit is here set forth in the Greek with a very great energy, such as our tongue is not able fully to express.

Here are three words, that have three articles, every word his several article by itself; *the* Spirit, not *a* Spirit; and not holy—but *the holy*; nor of God—but of that God 2Co_1 22, "Who has also sealed us, and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts." In these scriptures you see that the Spirit is a seal. Now, a seal among men is,

First, For secrecy.

Secondly, For distinction.

Thirdly, For authority.

Fourthly, For certainty. A writing sealed is authentic; and for ensuring.

In the three texts last cited, if you compare them together, you may observe these six things

First, The person sealing, and that is, the Father.

Secondly, In whom, in Christ.

Thirdly, With what seal, the Spirit of promise. Where are all the persons in the Trinity making us sure of our inheritance.

Fourthly, When, after you believed.

Fifthly, The end, which is twofold

(1.) Subordinate, and that is the certainty of our salvation;

(2.) Ultimate, and that is, the praise of his glory.

Sixthly, The time, how long this seal and earnest shall assure us, and that is, "until we have the complete possession of what it is in pledge."

To prevent mistakes and disputes about the sealings of the Spirit on the one hand; and to support, comfort, and encourage the poor people of God on the other hand, let me briefly hint at **the Spirit's special sealing times**.

[1.] First, CONVERSION times are often the Spirit's sealing times, Luk_15 22-23. Upon the prodigal's return, the fatted calf is killed, and the best robe is put upon his back, and the ring is put upon his hand, and shoes on his feet. Some by the **robe** understand the righteousness of Christ. And by the **ring**, some understand the pledges of God's love, rings being given as pledges of love; and by the ring others understand the seal of God's Holy Spirit, men using the seal with their rings. Among the Romans the ring was a sign of virtue, honor, and nobility, whereby those who wore them were distinguished from the common people.

I think the main thing intended by the robe and the ring is, to show us, that God sometimes upon the sinner's conversion and returning to him, is graciously pleased to give him some choice manifestations of his gracious pleasure and goodwill, and to seal up to him his everlasting love and favor. And hence it comes to pass that some that are but babes in Christ, 1Pe_2 2-3; 1Jn_2 12-14, are so diligent and active in religious duties, and so conscientious and dexterous in the exercise of their graces. At first conversion, God helps some of his people to read their own names written in legible letters in the book of life, Act_9 3-6. No sooner are some converted—but the Spirit stamps his seal upon them.

[2.] Secondly, BELIEVING times are sealing times, Eph_1 13. When they were in the very exercise of their faith, when they were acting of their faith, for so much the original imports, the Spirit came and sealed them up to the day of redemption, Rom_15 13; 1Pe_1 8. He who honors Christ by frequent actings of faith on him, him will Christ honor, by setting his seal and mark upon him.

[3.] Thirdly, HUMBLING times, mourning times, are sealing times. When a holy man was asked, which were the joyfullest days, the comfortablest days, that ever he enjoyed, he answered—his mourning days. His mourning days were his joyfullest days; and therefore he cried out, "Oh give me my mourning days, give me my mourning days; for they were my joyfullest days." Those were days wherein God sealed up his everlasting love to his soul, Job_22 29; Isa_29 19. When the prodigal had greatly humbled himself before his father, then the best robe and ring were put upon him, Luk_15 17-24. There are none who long for the sealings of the Spirit like humble souls; nor any set so high a price upon the sealings of the Spirit, as humble souls; nor any make so choice an improvement of the sealings of the Spirit, as humble souls. And therefore when men's hearts are humble and low, the Spirit comes and sets the secret-seal of heaven upon them.

[4.] Fourthly, SIN-KILLING, sin-mortifying, sin-subduing times, are the Spirit's sealing times; Rev_2 17, "To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, that no man knows, but he who receives it."

God will give to the victorious Christian a secret love-token, whereby his soul may rest assured of the unspeakable love of God, and of its freedom from condemnation. White stones were of very great use among the Romans, and among the Athenians, and served to acquit the accused in courts of justice. When malefactors were accused, arraigned, and condemned in their courts, they gave them a black stone in token of condemnation; but when they were acquitted, they gave them white stones, in token of absolution; and to this practice the Holy Spirit seems to allude. He who is victorious over his lusts shall have a new name, "which is better than the names of sons and daughters," Isa_56 5; and he shall have the pardon of his sins written in clear letters upon the white stone, so that he may run and read his absolution. The victorious Christian shall have assurance of the full discharge of all his sins, he shall have a clear evidence of his justification, and a blessed assurance of his eternal election; all which are hidden and mysterious things, to all but those who have experienced and tasted what these sweet meats of heaven mean, 1Jn_1 7.

Among the Romans there were solemn feasts held in honor of those who were victorious in their sacred games. Now those who were to be admitted to those feasts were accustomed to have their names written on white shells, and white stones, and by these tickets they were admitted. Now some think the Holy Spirit alludes to this practice, and so would hint to us a secret mark whereby victorious Christians may be known, and admitted as bidden guests to the heavenly banquet of the hidden, manna, according to Rev_19 9. O sirs! when predominate lusts are brought under, when bosom-sins lie slain in the soul—then the Spirit comes and seals up love, and life, and glory to the soul.

[5.] Fifthly, SUFFERING times are sealing times; Act_7 55-56; Act_7 59-60; Rev_1 9-10; 2Co_4 15-17. The primitive Christians found them so, and the suffering saints in the Marian days found them so. [Act_5 40-42; Psa_71 20-21; and Psa_94 19; Rev_1 9-10] When the furnace is seven times hotter than ordinary, the Spirit of the Lord comes and seals up a man's pardon in his bosom, and his peace with God, and his title to heaven. When the world frowns most—then God smiles most; when the world puts their iron chains upon the saints' legs—then God puts his golden chains about the saints' necks; when the world puts a bitter cup into one hand—then the Lord puts a cup of consolation into the other hand; when the world cries out, "Crucify them, crucify them!"—then commonly they hear that sweet voice from heaven, "These are my beloved ones, in whom I am well pleased."

Blessed Bradford looked upon his sufferings as an evidence to him that he was in the right way to heaven. And says Ignatius, "It is better for me to be a martyr than to be a monarch."

[6.] Sixthly, SELF-DENYING times are the Spirit's sealing times, Mat_19 27-29. "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." Mar_8 34

He must deny **sinful** self, which takes in a man's lusts.

He must deny **natural** self, which takes in a man's arts, parts, gifts, and reason.

He must deny **religious** self, which takes in all a man's religious duties and services, whether ordinary or extraordinary.

He must deny **moral** self, which includes a freedom from gross, heinous, enormous wickednesses; and a fair, sweet, harmless behavior towards men.

He must deny **relative** self, which takes in our nearest and dearest relations in the flesh; as wife, children, father, mother, brothers, sisters, etc., Psa_45 7-11.

Now when a man comes thus universally to deny himself for Christ's sake, and the gospel's sake, and religion's sake, then the Spirit of the Lord comes and seals him up unto the day of redemption. This is a truth confirmed by the experiences of many martyrs now in heaven, and by the testimony of many Christians still alive.

[7.] Seventhly, SACRAMENT times are sealing times. In that "feast of fat things," God by his Spirit seals up his love to his people, and his covenant to his people, and pardon of sin to his people, and heaven and happiness to his people. There are many precious souls who have found Christ in this ordinance, and when they could not find him in other ordinances, though they have sought him sorrowingly. In this ordinance many a distressed soul has been strengthened, comforted and sealed.

I might give you many instances. Take one for all. There was a gracious woman, who, after God had filled her soul with comfort, and sealed up his everlasting love to her, fell under former fears and trouble of spirit, and being at the Lord's supper, a little before the bread was administered to her, Satan seemed to appear to her, and told her that she should not presume to eat; but at that very nick of time, the Lord was pleased to bring into her mind that passage in the Canticles, "Eat, O my friend," Son_5 1. But notwithstanding this, Satan still continued terrifying of her, and when she had eaten, he told her that she should not drink; but then the Lord brought that second clause of the verse to her remembrance, "Drink, yes drink abundantly" (or, "be drunk," as the Hebrew has it) "my beloved" (or, "my loves," as the Hebrew has it;—all faithful souls are Christ's loves), and so she drank also, and presently was filled with such unspeakable joys, that she hardly knew how she got home; which soul-ravishing joys continued for a two weeks after, and filled her mouth with songs of praise, so that she could neither sleep nor eat, more than she forced herself to do out of conscience of duty. At the fortnight's end, when God was pleased to abate her measure of joy, she came to a settled peace of conscience, and assurance of the love of God; so that for twenty years after, she had not so much as a cloud upon her spirit, or the least questioning of her interest in Christ. But,

[8.] Eighthly, When God calls his people to some great and noble WORK, when he puts them upon some high services, some difficult duties, some holy and eminent employments—then his Spirit comes and sets his seal upon them Jer_1 5, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you to be a prophet unto the nations." The Lord sending the prophet Jeremiah to denounce most dreadful judgments against a rebellious people, an impudent brazen-faced nation, he assures him of his eternal election, and of his choice presence, and singular assistance in that work that he set him about, Jer_1 8; Jer_1 17-19. Thus the Lord dealt with Peter, James, and John, Mat_17 1-6, and thus be dealt with Paul, Act_9 1-23.

[9.] Ninthly, When they are taken up into more than ordinary COMMUNION with God—then is the Spirit's sealing time. When was it that the spouse cried out, "My beloved is mine, and I am his!" but when Christ brought her to his banqueting house, and his banner over her was love? Son_2 16; Son_2 3-6, compared, etc.

[10.] Tenthly and lastly, When Christians give themselves up to PRIVATE PRAYER, when Christians are more than ordinarily exercised in secret prayer, in closet duties—then the Spirit comes and seals up the covenant and the love of the Father to them. When Daniel had been wrestling and weeping, and weeping and wrestling all day long with God in his closet, then the angel tells him, "that he was a man greatly beloved of God." Dan_9 20-23.

There was a gracious woman who, after much frequenting of sermons, and walking in the ways of the Lord, fell into great desertions; but being in secret prayer, God came in with abundance of light and comfort, sealing up to her soul that part of his covenant, namely, "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them and they shall be my people, and I will be their God," Eze_11 19-20.

And thus I have given you a brief account of the Spirit's special sealing times. Now mark, this seal God sets upon all his wares, upon all his adopted children; for sooner or later, all of God's children are sealed with this seal. God sets his seal of regeneration, he stamps his image of holiness upon all his people, to difference and distinguish them from all profane, immoral, and hypocritical people in the world, Joh_3 3; 2Th_2 13; Heb_12 14. Doubtless the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, imprinting the likeness and lineaments of God's image of righteousness and holiness upon man, as a seal or signet does leave an impression and stamp of its likeness upon the thing sealed, is the seal of the Spirit spoken of in Scripture 2Ti_2 19, "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are his. And let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

But to prevent mistakes, you must remember, that though the Spirit of the Lord, first or last, will set his seal upon every real saint—yet the impression of that seal is not alike visible in all; for some bear this impression as babes, others as men grown up to some maturity. All God's adopted children bear this impression *truly*—but none of them bear it *perfectly* in this life. Sometimes this seal of regeneration, this seal of holiness is so plain and obvious that a man may run and read it in himself and others; and at other times it is so obscure and dark, that he can hardly discern it, either in himself or others. This seal is so lively stamped on some of God's people, that it discovers itself very visibly, eminently, gloriously; but on others it is not alike visible. And thus I have made it evident by these seven particulars, that all the children of God have the Spirit of God.

Now mark, the Spirit of God, who is in all the saints, is a Spirit of prayer and supplication Rom_8 15, "You have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." While the child is in the womb it cannot cry—but as soon as it is born it cries. While Paul did lie in the womb of his natural estate, he could not pray; but no sooner was he born of the Spirit—but the next news is, "Behold he prays!" Act_9 11. Prayer is nothing but the turning of a man's inside outward before the Lord. **The very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of a man's soul into the bosom of God.** Prayer is nothing but the breathing that out before the Lord that was first breathed into us by the Spirit of the Lord. Prayer is nothing but a choice, a free, a sweet, and familiar fellowship of the soul with God. Certainly, it is a great work of the Spirit to help the saints to pray Gal_4 6, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." **God has no stillborn children.** The gemination, "Abba, Father," notes fiducial, filial, and vehement affection. *Abba* is an Hebrew word; *Father* is a Greek word, whereby is signified the union of the Hebrews and Grecians, or the Jews and Gentiles, in one church, "Abba, Father." In Christ the cornerstone, both Jews and Gentiles are joined.

The word *Abba*, say others, signifies father in the Hebrew tongue, which the apostle here retains, because it is a word full of affection, which young children retain almost in all languages, when they begin to speak. And he adds the word *Father*, not only to expound the same—but also the better to express the eager movings and the earnest and vehement desires and singular affections of believers, in their crying unto God; even as Christ himself redoubled the word Father, Mar_14 36, to the same purpose, when he was in his greatest distress. This little word *Father*, says Luther, lisped forth in prayer by a child of God, exceeds the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and all other so famed orators in the world.

It is certain that the Spirit of God helps the saints in all their communions with God, namely, in their meditations of God, in their reading and hearing of the word of God, in the communions one with another, and in all their solemn addresses to God. And as to this the apostle gives us a most special instance in that Rom_8 26, "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercessions for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." When we are to pray, there is in us sometimes an infirmity of ignorance, so that we know not what to pray for, either in regard of the matter or the manner. And there is in us at other times an infirmity of pride and conceitedness, so that we cannot pray with that humility and lowliness of spirit as we should, spiritual pride having puffed up our prayers. Sometimes there is in us an infirmity of deadness, dullness, drowsiness, etc., so that we cannot pray with that warmth, heat, life, spirit, and fervency, as we should, or as we would. And at other times there is in us an infirmity of unbelief and slavish fears, so that we cannot pray with that faith and holy boldness, as befits children who draw near to a throne of grace, to a throne of mercy, etc. But now the Spirit helps these infirmities by way of instruction, prompting and teaching us what to pray for, and how we should spell our lesson; and by telling us as it were within, what we should say, and how we should sigh and groan; and by rousing and quickening, and stirring of us up to prayer, and by his singular influence and choice assistance opening and enlarging our hearts in prayer; and by his tuning the strings of our affections, he prepares us and fits us for the work of supplication.

Now, all the saints having the Spirit, and the Spirit being a Spirit of prayer and supplication, there is no reason in the world why a saint should say, 'I would pray in secret—but I cannot pray, I cannot pour out my soul nor my complaint before the Lord in a corner.'

(6.) Sixthly and lastly, You say you can not pray, you have not the gifts and abilities which others have. But you can manage your callings, your worldly business as well as others; and why then can you not pray as well as others? Ah, friends! did you but love private prayer as well as you love the world, and delight in private prayer as much as you delight in the world, and were your hearts as much set upon closet-prayer as they are set upon the world—you would never say you could not pray, yes, you would as quickly pray as well as others. It is not so much from lack of ability to pray in secret, that you don't pray in secret; as it is from lack of desire, and lack of heart to pray in secret, that you don't pray in secret.

Jacob's love to Rachel, and Shechem's love to Dinah, carried them through the greatest difficulties, Genesis 29 and Genesis 34. Were men's affections but strongly set upon private prayer, they would quickly find abilities to pray. He who sets his affections upon a virgin, though he be not learned nor eloquent, will find words enough to let her know how his heart is taken with her. The application is easy. He in Seneca complained of a thorn in his foot, when his lungs was rotten. So many complain of lack of ability to pray in their closets, when their hearts are rotten. Sirs! do but get better hearts, and then you will never say you can't pray. It is one of the saddest sights in all the world, to see men strongly parted and gifted for all worldly businesses, to cry out that they can't pray, that they have no ability to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret. You have sufficient parts and gifts to tell men of your sins, your needs, your dangers, your difficulties, your mercies, your deliverances, your duties, your crosses, your losses, your enjoyments, your friends, your foes; and why then are you not ashamed to complain of your want of parts and gifts, to tell those very things to God in a corner, which you can tell to men even upon the housetops? etc. But,

Objection 4. Fourthly, Some may further object and say, God is very well acquainted with all our needs, necessities, straits, trials; and there is no moving of him to bestow any favors upon us, which he does not intend to bestow upon us, whether we pray in our closets or no; and therefore to what purpose do you press secret prayer so hard upon us? etc.

To this objection I shall give these answers.

(1.) First, That this objection lies as strong against family prayer and public prayer, as it does against private prayer. God knows all your needs and necessities, all your straits and trials, etc., and therefore what need you pray in your family, what need you attend public prayers in the communion of saints? There is no wringing of any mercy out of the hands of heaven, which God does not intend to bestow. This objection faces all kind of prayer, and fights against all kinds of prayer. But,

(2.) Secondly, I answer, That private prayer is that piece of divine worship and adoration, it is a part of that homage which we owe to God upon the account of a divine command, as I have already proved. Now, all objections must bow before the face of divine commands; as Joseph's brethren bowed before him, Gen_42 6; or as king Ahasuerus his servants bowed before Haman, Est_3 2. Indeed, every objection that is formed up against a divine command, should fall before it, as Dagon fell before the ark, or as Goliath fell before David. He who casts off private prayer under any pretense whatever, he casts off the dominion of God, the authority of God, and this may be as much as a man's life and soul is worth. But,

(3.) Thirdly, I answer, **Though prayer is not the ground, nor the cause of obtaining favors and mercies from God—yet it is the means, it is the silver channel, it is the golden pipe, through which the Lord is pleased to convey to his people all temporal, spiritual, and eternal favors**, [Isa_55 6; Jas_1 5; Isa_62 7; Psa_22 24] Eze_36 26-37. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Mat_7 7-8.

God promises to give them the cream, the choicest, the sweetest of all spiritual, eternal, and temporal blessings; but mark, Eze_36 37, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Though God is very prompt and ready to bestow upon his people the best and the greatest of blessings—yet he will by prayer be sought unto for the actual enjoyment of them. He who has no heart to pray for a mercy, he has no ground to believe that ever God will give him the mercy. There is no receiving without asking, no finding without seeking, no opening without knocking. The threefold promise annexed to the threefold precept in Mat_7 7, should encourage all Christians to be instant, fervent, and constant in prayer. The proud beggar gets nothing from men, and the dumb sinner gets nothing of God. As there is no mercy too great for God to give, so there is no mercy too little for us to crave. Certainly that man has little worth in him who thinks any mercy not worth a seeking. But,

(4.) Fourthly and lastly, I answer, Every Christian should labor to enjoy his mercies in mercy; he should labor to have his blessings blessed unto him; he should labor to have "the good will of him who dwelt in the bush," with all he has, Gen_22 17. Now this is an everlasting truth, a maxim to live and die with, that **whatever mercy comes not in upon the wing of prayer is not given in mercy**. Oh, how sweet is that mercy that comes flying in upon the wing of prayer! How sweet was that water to Samson which streamed to him in the channel of private prayer, Jdg_15 19; he called the name of it En-hakkcore, the well of him who prayed. Samson prayed as for life, and that water that was handed to him was as sweet as life. Every mercy which is gathered by the hand of prayer is as sweet as the rose of Sharon, Son_2 1. But that mercy which comes not in at the door of prayer, comes not in at the right door; and that mercy that comes not in at the right door will do a man no good such mercies will make themselves wings and fly from us, Pro_23 5.

Every Christian should narrowly look that all his mercies are sanctified mercies. Now, every mercy is sanctified by the word and prayer, 1Ti_4 4-5. Prayer prepares and fits us for mercy, and mercy for us. It is prayer which gives us a right and holy use of all our mercies. Such mercies are but great miseries, which come not in upon the wing of prayer. Prayerless men's mercies are all given in wrath; yes, their blessings are cursed unto them, Pro_3 33; Mal_2 2. Look! as every sacrifice was to be seasoned with salt, so every mercy is to be sanctified by prayer. Look! as gold sometimes is laid not only upon cloth and silks—but also upon silver itself, so prayer is that golden duty that must be laid not only upon all our natural and civil actions, as eating, drinking, buying, selling, etc.—but also upon all our silver duties, upon all our most religious and spiritual performances, as hearing, reading, meditating, conference, church-fellowship, breaking of bread, etc.

Certainly prayer is very necessary to make every providence, and every ordinance, and every mercy—to be a blessing to us. Every mercy that comes in upon the wing of private prayer is a double mercy; it is a great-bellied mercy; it is a mercy that has many mercies in the womb of it. Happy is that Christian who can lay his hand upon every mercy that he enjoys, and say of them all as once Hannah said of her Samuel 1Sa_1 27, "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of him." But,

Objection 5. Fifthly, Some may further object and say, I would drive a private trade with God, I would exercise myself in secret prayer—but I lack a convenient place to retire into; I lack a private corner to unbosom my soul to my Father in, etc.

To this objection I shall give these three short answers

(1.) First, I suppose this objection concerns but a few Christians in our days. That God who has given a Christ to believers does commonly give them a convenient corner to enjoy private communion with himself in, Rom_8 32. Most Christians, I am afraid, do rather lack a heart for private prayer, than a convenient place for private prayer. What men set their hearts upon, they will find time and place to effect it, whether it be good or whether it be evil, whether it concerns temporals or spirituals, whether it concerns this world or another world, this life or eternal life. If most men would but get better hearts, they would quickly find or make convenient places for private prayer. He who has an inflamed love to God will certainly find out a corner to enjoy secret communion with God. True lovers will find out corners to enjoy one another in. How many men are there, who can easily find out private places for their dogs to lie in, and their swine to sleep in, and their horses to stand in, and their oxen to feed in, etc., who can't find out a private place to seek the face of God in! But did these men but love their God, or their souls, or private prayer, or eternity, as well or better than their beasts, they would not be such brutes but that they would quickly find out a hole, a corner, to wait upon the Lord in. But,

(2.) Secondly, I answer, If a Christian be on the top of a house with Peter, he may pray there; or if he be walking in the field with Isaac, he may pray there; or if be on the mountain with Christ, he may pray there; or if he be behind the door with Paul, he may pray there; or if he be waiting at table with Nehemiah, he may secretly pray there; or if he be in a forest, he may pray there, as the primitive Christians in times of persecution did; or if he be behind a tree, he may pray there; or if he be by the sea side, he may pray there, as the apostles did. It was a choice saying of Austin, "Every saint is God's temple," says he, "and he who carries his temple about him, may go to prayer when he pleases." Some saints have never had so much of heaven brought down into their hearts, as when, they have been with God in a corner. Oh the secret manifestations of divine love, the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret influences, the secret communion with God, that many a precious Christian has had in the most solitary places it may be behind the door, or behind the wall, or behind the hedge, or behind the arbor, or behind the tree, or behind the rock, or behind the bush, etc. But,

(3.) Thirdly, and lastly, Did you never in your unregenerate estate make use of all your wits, and parts, and utmost endeavors, to find out convenient seasons, and secret corners, and solitary places—to sin in, and to dishonor your God in, and to undo your own and others' souls in? Yes! I remember with shame and blushing, that it was so with me when I was dead in trespasses and sins, and walked according to the course of this world, Eph_2 1-3. Oh, how much then does it concern you in your renewed, sanctified, and raised estate, to make use of all your wits, and parts, and utmost endeavors, to find out the fittest seasons, and the most secret corners, and solitary places you can, to honor your God in, and to seek the welfare of your own and others' souls in! Oh that men were but as serious, studious, and industrious, to find out convenient seasons, secret places to please and serve and glorify the Lord in—as they have been serious, studious, and industrious to find out convenient seasons, and secret places to displease and grieve the Spirit of the Lord in. But,

07 Six objections stated and answered contd1

Objection 6. Sixthly, and lastly, others may further object and say, We would be often in private with God, we would give ourselves up to closet-prayer—but that we can no sooner shut our closet doors—but a multitude of infirmities, weaknesses, and vanities do face us, and rise up against us. Our **hearts** being full of distempers and follies; and our **bodies**, say some, are under great indispositions; and our **souls**, say others, are under present indispositions; and how then can we seek the face of God in a corner? how can we wrestle with God in our closets? etc.

Now, to this objection I shall give these six answers.

(1.) If these kinds of reasonings or arguings were sufficient to shut private prayer out of doors, where does that man or woman live, that husband or wife, that father or child, that master or servant—who would ever be found in the practice of that duty? [Psa_40 12; Psa_51 5; Rom_7 15; Rom_7 24; Psa_130 3; 1Co_4 4; 2Ch_6 36; Php_3 12] Where is there a person under heaven whose heart is not full of infirmities, weaknesses, follies, and vanities; and whose body and soul is not too often indisposed to closet duties? 1Ki_8 46, "If they sin against you, for there is no man who sins not, etc." Ecc_7 20, "For there is not a just man upon the earth that does good and sins not." Pro_20 9, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" Job_14 4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Job_9 30-31, "If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands ever so clean; yet shall you plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me." Job_9 20, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse." Psa_143 2, "And enter not into judgment with your servant for in your sight shall no man living be justified." Jas_3 2, "For in many things we all offend." 1Jn_1 8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Such who affirm that men may be **fully perfect in this life**, or without sin in this life—they do affirm that which is expressly contrary to the Scriptures last cited, and to the universal experience of all saints, who daily feel and lament over that body of sin and death which they bear about with them; yes, they do affirm that which is quite contrary to the very state or constitution of all the saints in this life. In every saint, "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusts against the flesh, and these are contrary one to the other, so that they cannot do the things that they would," Gal_5 17. In every Christian man there are two men, the old man and the new; the one must be daily put on, and the other daily put off, Eph_4 22-24. All saints have a law in their members rebelling against the law of their minds; so that the good that they would do, they do not; and the evil that they would not do, that they do, Rom_7 23; Rom_7 25, comp. They have two contrary principles in them, from whence proceeds two manner of actions, motions, and inclinations, continually opposite one to another. Hence it is that there is a continual combat in them, like the struggling of the twins in Rebekah's womb.

An absolute perfection is peculiar to the triumphant state of God's elect in heaven heaven is the only privileged place, where no unclean thing can enter in, Rev 23 21; that is the only place where neither sin nor Satan shall ever get footing. Such as dream of an absolute perfection in this life, do confound and jumble heaven and earth together; the state of the church militant, with the state of the church triumphant, which are certainly distinct both in time and place, and in order, measure, and attendants, Heb_12 22-23. This dangerous opinion of absolute perfection in this life, shakes the very foundation of religion, and overthrows the gospel of grace; it renders the satisfaction of Christ, and all his great transactions, null and void; it tells the world that there is no need of faith, of repentance, of ordinances, of watchfulness. Those who say they have no sin, say they have no need of the blood of Christ to cleanse them from sin, 1Jn_1 7. Such as say they have no sin, say they have no need of faith to rest upon Christ for imputed righteousness to justify their persons. Such as say they have no sin, say they have no need of Christ as king to subdue their lusts; nor as priest, to expiate offences; nor as prophet, to teach and instruct them; nor as a Savior, to save them from their sins, or from wrath to come, Mat_1 21; 1Th_1 10. Those who have a perfect righteousness of their own, need not be indebted to Christ for his pure, perfect, spotless, matchless righteousness. Such as are without sin have no cause to repent of sin, nor yet to watch against sin. Such as are perfect cannot say, 'We are unprofitable servants.'

But are they indeed just? Then they must live by faith, Heb_2 4. Are they men, and not angels? Then they must repent, Act_17 30, "For now he commands all men everywhere to repent." **Surely the best of men—are but men at the best.** Oh how bad those men must be, who make God himself a liar, 1Jn_1 10. But if these men are absolutely perfect, how comes it to pass that they are afflicted and diseased as other men? How comes it to pass that they eat, and drink, and sleep, and buy, and sell, and die as other men? Are these things consistent with an absolute perfection? Surely not! An absolute perfection is not a step short of heaven; it is heaven on this side heaven; and those who would obtain it must step to heaven before they have it. But,

(2.) Secondly, I answer, That this objection lies as strong against family-prayer, and against all other kind of prayer, as it does against closet-prayer. He who shall upon any grounds make this objection a great bugbear to scare his soul from closet-prayer; he may upon the same ground make it a great bugbear to scare his soul not only from all other kind of prayer—but from all other duties of religion also, whether private or public. The spirit of this objection fights against all religion at once; and therefore you should say to it, as Christ said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" But.

(3.) Thirdly, I answer, It is not the infirmities and weaknesses of a Christian which are known, lamented, bewailed, and resisted—that can obstruct or hinder the efficacy and success of his prayers. A spiritual infirmity is the indisposition of the soul, which arises from a weakness of grace. Let me clear up this in a few instances. **Jonah**, you know, was a man full of sinful passions, and other weaknesses, etc., and yet his prayer was very prevalent with God Jon_2 1-2; Jon_2 7; Jon_2 10, compared.

So **Elijah's** prayers were exceeding prevalent with God; he could open and shut heaven at his pleasure; and yet subject to like passions as we are, Jas_3 17. Elijah was a man of extraordinary sanctity and holiness, a man who lived in heaven while he dwelt on earth; Enoch-like, he walked with God, and yet subject to like passions as we are, 1Ki_19 8; Rom_11 2-3. God did in an eminent way communicate to him his counsel and secrets; he lay in the bosom of the Father; and yet was a man subject to like passions as we are. He was a very powerful and prevalent prophet; his very name imports as much; Eli-jah signifies *my strong God*. In that 1Ki_17 1, it is Eli-jahu, that is, *the Lord is my strong God*; and yet subject to like passions as we are. He was a man much in fasting and prayer; he was an inferior mediator between God and his people; and yet subject to like passions as we are.

Now because some from hence might object and say, No wonder if such a man as he was, could by his prayers open and shut heaven at his pleasure; but I am a poor, weak, low, sinful, and unworthy creature; I am full of infirmities, weaknesses, and passions; and shall my prayers ever find access to God, and acceptance with God, or gracious answers and returns from God? Now to obviate this objection, and to remove this discouragement out of the thoughts and hearts of poor sinners, the Holy Spirit adds this clause, that he was not a God, nor an angel—but a *man*, and such a man as was not exempted from common infirmities; for he had his passions, frailties, and weaknesses as well as other saints; intimating to us, that infirmities in the lowest saints should no more prejudice the acceptance and success of their prayers with God, than they did in Elijah himself.

The word *passion* sometimes signifies, first, a motion of the sensual appetite, arising from the imagination of good or ill, with some commotion of the body; secondly, sometimes passions signify sinful infirmities, sinful perturbations of the mind; and thirdly, sometimes passion is taken more strictly for the especial affection of sinful anger and wrath, which Chrysostom calls a short devil. It makes a man speak he knows not what, as you may see in Jonah; and to do he knows not what, as you may see in Saul. Now in these two last senses Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and yet a man so potent with God, that by private prayer he could do even what he desired in the court of heaven.

In 1 Samuel 21, you may read of **David's** bold lies, and of his other failings, infirmities, and unseemly carriages before Achish, king of Gath, and for which he was turned out of the king's presence, under the notion of a madman; and yet at that very time he prays, and prevails with God for favor, mercy, and deliverance Psa_34 4, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me out of all my fear." But when was this? Read the title of the psalm, and you shall find it "A psalm of David, who changed his behavior before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed."

In Num_20 10-12, **Moses'** infirmities are pointed out.

First, You have there his immoderate anger.

(2.) His speaking to the people, when he should have spoken to the rock, Num_20 8.

(3.) His smiting of it, when he should only have spoken to it with the rod in his hand; and smiting it twice, as in a pang of passion and impatience.

(4.) His distrusting of the Lord's word, Num_20 12.

(5.) His reviling of the people, when he should have convinced them, "Hear, you rebels."

(6.) He seems to be so offended at his commission, that he can hardly forbear murmuring "Must we bring water out of the rock?" Mark that word, "must we." Oh how is the meekest man in all the world transported into passion, and anger, and unbelief, and hurried into sad indecencies! Num_12 3. And yet there was not a man on earth whose prayers were so powerful and prevalent with God as Moses' were, Psa_106 23; Exo_32 9-15; Exo_33 11-17; Exo_14 13-16, etc.

So king **Asa** was a man full of infirmities and weaknesses; he relies on the king of Syria, and not on the Lord, 2Ch_16 7-13; he is very impatient, and under a great rage upon the prophet's reproof. He imprisons the prophet; he oppressed some of the people; or, as the Hebrew has it, "he crushed," or he trampled upon some of the people at the same time; and being greatly diseased in his feet, he sought to the physicians and not to the Lord. And yet this man's prayer was wonderfully prevalent with God, 2Ch_14 11-15.

The saints' failings and infirmities can never make void those gracious promises by which God stands engaged to hearken to the prayers of his people, Psa_50 15; Isa_30 19, and Isa_65 24. God's hearing of our prayers does not depend upon sanctification—but upon Christ's intercession; not upon what we are in ourselves—but upon what we are in the Lord Jesus; both our persons and our prayers are acceptable in the beloved, Eph_1 6; 1Pe_2 5. When God hears our prayers, it is neither for our own sakes nor yet for our prayers' sake—but it is for his own sake, and his Son's sake, and his glory's sake, and his promise's sake, etc.

Certainly God will never cast off his people for their failings and infirmities.

First, It is the glory of a man to pass by infirmities, Pro_19 11. Oh how much more, then, must it be the glory of God to pass by the infirmities of his people!

Secondly, Saints are children; and what father will cast off his children for their infirmities and weaknesses? Psa_103 13-14; 1Co_12 27.

Thirdly, Saints are members of Christ's body; and what man will cut off a limb because there is a scab or wart upon it? "What man will cut off his nose," says Luther, "because there is some filth in it?"

Fourthly, Saints are Christ's purchase; they are his possession, his inheritance. [Eph_1 22-23; 1Co_6 20; 1Co_7 23; 1Pe_1 18-20] Now what man is there that will cast away, or cast off his purchase, his possession, his inheritance, because of thorns, bushes, or briars that grow upon it?

Fifthly, Saints are in a marriage-covenant with God, Hos_2 19-20. Now what husband is there that will cast off his wife for her failings and infirmities? So long as a man is in covenant with God, his infirmities can't cut him off from God's mercy and grace. Now it is certain a man may have very many infirmities upon him, and yet not break his covenant with God, for no sin breaks a man's covenant with God but such as unties the marriage knot.

As in other marriages, every offence or infirmity does not disannul the marriage union; it is only the breach of the marriage vow, namely, adultery, which unties the marriage knot; so here it is only those sins which breaks the covenant, which unties the marriage knot between God and the soul (1) When men freely subject to any lust as a new master; or, (2.) When men take another husband; and this men do, when they enter into a league with sin or the world, when they make a new covenant with hell and death, Isa_28 15; Isa_28 18. Now from these mischiefs God secures his chosen ones. In a word, if God should cast off his people for their failings and infirmities, then none of the sons or daughters of Adam could be saved "For there is not a just man upon the earth that does good and sins not," Ecc_7 20. Now if God will not cast off his people for their infirmities, then certainly he will not cast off the prayers of his people because of those invincible infirmities which hang upon them; and therefore our infirmities should not discourage us, or take us off from closet prayer, or from any other duties of religion. But,

(4.) Fourthly, I answer, The more infirmities and weaknesses hang upon us, the more cause have we to keep close and constant to our closet-duties. If grace is weak, the omission of private prayer will make it weaker. Look! as he who will not eat will certainly grow weaker and weaker; so he who will not pray in his closet will certainly grow weaker and weaker. If corruptions are strong, the neglect of private prayer will make them stronger. The more the remedy is neglected, the more the disease is strengthened. Whatever the distempers of a man's heart be, they will never be abated—but augmented, by the omission of private prayer. The more bodily infirmities hang upon us, the more need we have of the physician; and so the more sinful infirmities hang upon our souls, the more need we have of private prayer. All sinful omissions will make work for repentance, for hell, or for the physician of souls. Sinful omissions lead to sinful commissions, as you may see in the angels that fell from heaven to hell, and in Adam's fall in paradise.

Origen going to comfort and encourage a martyr who was to be tortured, was himself apprehended by the officers, and constrained either to offer to the idols, or to have his body tortured; of which hard choice, to save his life, he bowed unto the idol; but afterwards, making a sad confession of his foul fact, he said, "That he went forth that morning before he had been with God in his closet;" and so peremptorily concludes, "that his neglect of prayer was the cause of his falling into that great sin."

The neglect of one day, of one duty, of one hour, would undo us forever, if we had not an advocate with the Father, 1Jn_2 1-2. Those years, those months, those weeks, those days, those hours that are not filled up with God, with Christ, with grace, with duty, will certainly be filled up with vanity and folly. All omissions of duty, will more and more unfit the soul for duty. A key thrown aside, gathers rust; a pump not used, will be hard to work; and armor not used, will not be bright, etc. Look! **as sinful commissions will stab the soul; so sinful omissions will starve the soul**. Such as live in the neglect of private prayer may well cry out, Isa_24 16; Job_16 8, "Our leanness, our leanness!" And therefore away with all these pleas and reasonings about infirmities, and weaknesses, and indispositions, and address yourselves to closet prayer! But,

(5.) Fifthly, I answer, It may be your distemper and indisposition of body is not so great—but that you can buy, and sell, and get gain. Notwithstanding your aching head, and your shooting back, and your pained sides, and your feeble knees—yet you can, with Martha, cumber yourself about your worldly affairs. In that Son_5 3, Christ calls upon his spouse to open the door, and let him in. But sin and shifting coming into the world together, see how poorly and unworthily she labors to shift Christ off "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" Rather than she will make no excuse for herself, she will make a silly excuse, a worthless excuse. She was not a mere child; and what a great business had it been for her to have risen to have let in such a guest, who brings everything with him that heart can wish or need require, Rev_3 17-18. She was not grown so decrepit with old age—but that she was able to make herself ready; at least, she might easily have slipped on her morning-coat and stepped to the door without any danger of taking cold, or of being wet to the skin, and so have let him in, who never comes empty-handed, Rev_22 12; yes, who was now come full of the dew of divine blessings to enrich her; for so some sense those words, "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Oh, the frivolous pretenses, and idle excuses that even gracious people are apt sometimes to take up to over-color their neglect of duty!

But some may say, It may be the spouse of Christ was asleep. Oh no! for she says, Son_5 2, "I sleep—but my heart wakes." She slept with open eyes, as the lion does; she slept but half-sleep; though her outward man was drowsy—yet her inward man was wakeful; though the flesh took a nap—yet her spirit did not nod.

Oh! but it may be Christ made no noise, he gave no notice that he was at the door! O yes! he knocked and knocked by the hammer of his word, and the hand of his Spirit; he knocked by outward corrections and inward admonitions; he knocked by providences, and he knocked by mercies. His importunity and vehemency for admission was very great.

Oh! but it maybe he did but only knock, he should have called as well as knocked; for none but madmen would open their doors in the night, except they knew the voice of him who knocks. Oh yes! he did not only knock—but called also.

Oh! but it may be she did not know his voice, and therefore she would not open. No chaste wife will at unseasonable hours arise and open her doors unto a stranger, especially in her husband's absence. Oh yes, she knew his voice Son_5 2, "It is the voice of my beloved who knocks." She was not so fast asleep—but that she knew the voice of her beloved from all other voices, and could tell every tittle that he said. The calls of Christ were so strong, so loud, and his pulsations so mighty, that she could not but know and confess, that it was the voice of her beloved, though she was not so respectful and dutiful as to obey that voice.

Oh! but it may be Christ knocked and called, like a friend in his journey, only to inquire how it was with her, or to speak to her at the window. Oh no! he speaks plainly, he speaks with authority, "Open to me!"

Oh! but it may be she had no power to open the door. Oh yes; for when he commands his people to open, he lends them a key to open the door, that he may enter in, Php_1 6; Php_1 13; 1Co_15 10. Infused grace is a living principle that will enable the soul to open to Christ. If a man be not a free agent to work and act by the helps of grace received, to what purpose are counsels, commands, exhortations and directions, given to perform this, and that, and the other work? And certainly it is our greatest honor and happiness in this world to cooperate with God in those things which concern his own glory, and our own internal and eternal good.

Oh! but it may be Christ had given his spouse some distaste, or it may be he had let fall some hard words, or some unkind speeches, which made her a little froward and petulant. Oh no! for he owns her as his beloved, and courts her highly, with the most winning and amicable terms of love "My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled, or my perfect one." He calls her so for her dovelike simplicity, purity, and integrity. All these endearing and honoring titles, are the rhetoric of divine love; and should have been as so many sacred engagements upon her, to open to her beloved.

Oh! but it may be Christ was too quick for her, it may be he gave but a knock and a call, and was gone before she could rise and open the door. O no! Christ stayed until his head was filled with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night; which most passionate expression notes the tender goodness, patience, and gentleness of our Lord Jesus, who endures far greater and harder things for his spouse's sake, than ever Jacob did for his Rachel's sake.

After Christ had suffered much for her sake, and waited her leisure a long while, she very unkindly, and very unmannerly, and unworthily turns her back upon all his sweet and comfortable compellations, and blessed and bleeding embracements, and turns him off to look for his lodging in some other place; so that he might well have said, Is this your kindness to your friend, your husband, your Lord—to allow him to stand bareheaded, and that in foul weather, yes, in the night time, wooing, entreating, and beseeching admittance; and yet to turn him off as one in whom your soul could take no pleasure?

Now, if you will but seriously weigh all these circumstances in the balance of the sanctuary, you may run and read the fault and folly, the weakness and madness, the slightness and laziness of the spouse; and by her you may make a judgment of those sad and sinful distempers that may seize upon the best of saints, and see how ready the flesh is to frame excuses; and all to keep the soul off from duty, and the doors fast bolted against the Lord Jesus.

It is sad when men are well enough to sit, and chat, and trade in their shops—but are not well enough to pray in their closets. Certainly, that man's heart is not right with God, at least at this time, who, under all his bodily distempers, can maintain and keep up his public trade with men—but is not well enough to maintain his private trade with heaven. Our bodies are but dirt, handsomely fashioned. We derive our pedigree from the dirt, and are akin to clay. One calls the body "the blot of nature;" another calls it the "the soul's beast," "a sack of dung," "worms' food;" another calls it "a prison," "a sepulcher;" and Paul calls it "a body of vileness." "All your life you will sweat to produce food, until your dying day. Then you will return to the ground from which you came. For you were made from dust, and to the dust you will return." Gen_3 19. Now for a man to make so much ado about the distempers of his body to excuse the neglects of his soul, is an evil made up of many evils.

But really, sir, I am so ill, and my body is so distempered and indisposed, that I am not able to mind or meddle with the least things of the world! Well! if this be so, then know that God has on purpose knocked you off from the things of this world, that you may look the more effectually after the things of the eternal world. The design of God in all the distempers that are upon your body, is to wind you more off from your worldly trade, and to work you to follow your heavenly trade more close. Many a man had never found the way to his closet, if God by bodily distempers had not turned him out of his shop, his trade, his business, his all, etc.

Well, Christians! remember this once for all, if your indisposition to closet prayer does really arise from bodily distempers, then you may be confident that the Lord will pity you much, and bear with you much, and kindly accept of a little. You know how affectionately parents and kind masters treat their children and servants, when they are under bodily distempers and indisposition; and you may be confident that God will never treat you worse. Ponder often upon that Eze_34 4; Eze_34 16; Eze_34 21-22. But,

(6.) Sixthly, and lastly, I shall answer this objection by way of distinction, thus FIRSTLY, There is a voluntary indisposition to private prayer; and there is an involuntary indisposition to private prayer.

There is a **voluntary** indisposition, and that is when a man, by his willful sinning against light, knowledge, conviction, etc., contracts that guilt that lies as a load upon his conscience. Now guilt makes the soul shy of God; and the greater the guilt is, the more shy the soul is of drawing near to God in a corner. The child that is sensibly under guilt hides himself; as Adam did, in the day from his father's eye, and at night he slips to bed, to avoid either a chiding or a whipping from his father, Gen_3 7-8. Guilt makes a man fly from God, and fly from prayer. It is a hard thing to look God in the face, when guilt stares a man in the face, Job_11 14-15. Guilt makes a man a terror to himself, Jer_20 3-4; now when a man is a terror to himself, he is neither fit to live, nor fit to die, nor fit to pray.

When poison gets into the body, it works upon the vitals, and it weakens the vitals, and it endangers life, and unfits and indisposes a man to all natural actions. It is so here; when guilt lies heavy upon the conscience, it works upon the soul, it weakens the soul, it endangers the soul, and it does greatly unfit and indispose the soul to all holy actions. Guilt fights against our souls, our consciences, our comforts, our duties, yes, and our very graces also, 1Pe_2 11. There is nothing which wounds and lames our graces like guilt; there is nothing which weakens and wastes our graces like guilt; there is nothing which hinders the activity of our graces like guilt; nor there is nothing which clouds our evidences of grace like guilt. Look! what water is to the fire, that our sinnings are to our graces, evidences, and duties. Guilt is like Prometheus' vulture, which ever lies gnawing. It is better with Evagrius to lie on a bed of straw with a good conscience, than to lie on a bed of down with a guilty conscience.

What the probationer-disciple said to our Savior—Mat_8 19, "Master, I will follow you wherever you go,"—that a guilty conscience says to the sinner, "Wherever you go I will follow you." If you go to a fast, I will follow you, and fill your mind with black and dismal apprehensions of God; if you go to a feast, I will follow you, and show you the handwriting on the wall, Dan_5 5; if you go abroad, I will follow you, and make you afraid of every leaf that shakes; you shall look upon every bush as an armed man, and upon every man as a devil; if you stay at home, I will follow you from room to room, and fill you with horror and terror; if you lie down to rest, I will follow you with fearful dreams and tormenting apparitions; if you go into your closet, I will follow you, and make your very closet a hell to hold you.

It is storied of king Richard the Third, that after he had murdered his two nephews, guilt lay so hard upon his conscience, that his sleeps were very unquiet; for he would often leap out of his bed in the dark, and catching his sword in his hand, which hung by his bedside, he would go distractedly about his chamber seeking for the traitor.

So Charles the Ninth of France, after he had made the streets of Paris run down with the blood of the Protestants, he could seldom take any sound sleep, nor could he endure to be awakened out of his sleep without music.

Judge Morgan, who passed the sentence of condemnation upon Jane Grey, a virtuous lady, shortly after fell mad, and in his raving cried out continually, "Take away the Lady Jane from me, take away the Lady Jane from me," and in that horror ended his wretched life.

James Abyes, going to execution for Christ's sake, as he went along, he gave his money and his clothes to one and another, until he had given all away to his shirt, whereupon one of the sheriff's men fell a-scoffing and deriding of him, and told him that he was a madman and a heretic, and not to be believed; but as soon as the good man was executed, this wretch was struck mad, and threw away his clothes, and cried out that "James Abyes was a good man, and gone to heaven—but he himself was a wicked man, and was damned," and thus he continued crying out until his death. Certainly he who derides a man for walking according to the word of the Lord, the Lord will, sooner or later, so smite and wound that man's conscience, that all the physicians in the world shall not heal it.

Now if your indisposition to private prayer springs from contracting guilt upon your conscience, then your best way is speedily to renew your repentance, and greatly to judge and humble your own soul, and so to act faith afresh upon the blood of Christ, both for pardoning mercy and for purging grace. When a man is stung with guilt, it is his highest wisdom in the world to look up to the brazen serpent, and not to spend his time or create torments to his own soul by perpetual poring upon his guilt. When guilt upon the conscience works a man to water the earth with tears, and to make heaven ring with his groans, then it works kindly. When the sense of guilt drives a man to God, to duty, to the throne of grace, then it will not be long night with that man. He who thinks to shift off private prayer under the pretense of guilt, does but in that increase his own guilt. Neglect of duty will never get guilt off the conscience.

But there is also an **involuntary** indisposition to private prayer; as in a sick man, who would work and walk—but cannot, being hindered by his disease; or as it is with a man who has a great chain on his leg, he would very gladly walk or get away—but his chain hinders him. Now if your indisposition to private prayer is an involuntary indisposition, then God will in mercy, in course, both pardon it and remove it.

SECONDLY, There is a total indisposition to private prayer, and there is a partial indisposition to private prayer.

A **total** indisposition to private prayer is, when a man has no mind at all to private prayer, nor any will at all to private prayer, nor any love at all to private prayer, nor any delight, nor any heart at all to private prayer, Jer_4 22, and Jer_44 17-19. Now where this frame of heart is, there all is evil, very evil, stark evil.

A **partial** indisposition to private prayer is, when a man has some will to private prayer, though not such a will as once he had; and some mind to private prayer, though not such a mind as once he had; and some affections to private prayer, though not such warm and burning affections as once he had.

Now if your indisposition to private prayer is total, then you must wait upon the Lord in all his appointments for a changed nature, and for union with Christ; but if your indisposition to private prayer be only partial, then the Lord will certainly pardon it, and in the very use of holy means, in time remove it. But,

THIRDLY, and lastly, There is a transient, accidental, occasional, or fleeting indisposition to private prayer; and there is a customary, a constant, or permanent indisposition to private prayer.

Now a transient, accidental, **occasional**, or fleeting indisposition to that which is good may be found upon the best of saints, as you may see in Moses, Exo_4 10-14; and in Jeremiah, Jer_1 5-8; Jer_1 17-19, and Jer_20 9; and in Jonah 1; and in David, Psa_39 2-3. Now if this be the indisposition that you are under, then you may be confident that it will certainly work off by degrees, as theirs did—which I have cited, Isa_65 2.

But then there is a customary, a **constant** or permanent indisposition to private prayer, and to all other holy duties of religion. Now if this be the indisposition that you are under, then I may safely conclude that you are in the very gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity, Act_8 21-23, and your work lies not in complaining of your indisposition—but in repenting and believing, and in laboring for a change of your heart and state; for until your heart, your state be changed, you will remain forever indisposed both to closet prayer and to all other duties of religion and godliness. To see a sinner sailing hell-ward with wind and tide on his side—to alter his course, and tack about for heaven; to see the earthly man become heavenly; the carnal man become spiritual; the proud man become humble; the vain man become serious; to see a sinner move contrary to himself in the ways of Christ and holiness—is as strange as to see a fish flying in mid air, contrary to its own nature. And yet a divine power of God upon the soul can effect it; and this must be effected before the sinner will be graciously inclined and sincerely disposed to closet prayer. And let thus much suffice by way of answer to this objection also.

08 Eleven advices and counsels

Eleven advices and counsels

Now, for the better management of this great duty, namely, closet prayer, I beseech you take my advice and counsel in these eleven following particulars.

(1.) First, **Be frequent in closet prayer**, and not *now and then* only. He will never make any earnings of closet prayer, who is not frequent in closet prayer. Now, that this counsel may stick, consider,

[1.] First, Other eminent servants of the Lord have been frequent in this blessed work Neh_1 6, "Let your ear now be attentive, and your eyes open, that you may hear the prayer of your servant, which I pray before you, day and night." So Daniel, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did beforetime, Dan_6 10. So David, "My voice shall you hear in the morning, and in the evening will I direct my prayer unto you, and will look up," Psa_5 3. So Psa_88 13, "But unto you have I cried, O Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you." So Psa_119 147, "I rise before dawn and cry out for help." So Psa_55 17, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud." Psa_109 4, "I give myself unto prayer;" or, as the Hebrew may be read, "But I am a man of prayer."

Of Carolus Magnus it was said, that he spoke more with God than with men.

[2.] Secondly, Consider the blessed Scripture does not only enjoin this duty—but it requires frequency in it also, Luk_18 1; 1Th_5 17; Col_4 2. In the former part of this discourse, I have given light into these scriptures; and therefore the bare citing of them must now suffice.

[3.] Thirdly, Christ was frequent in private prayer, as you may easily see by comparing of these scriptures together, Mar_1 35; Mat_14 23; Luk_22 39; Joh_18 2. In my second argument for private prayer you may see these scriptures opened and amplified. But,

[4.] Fourthly, Consider that you have the examples of the very worst of men in this case. Papists are frequent in their private devotions. And the Mahommedans, whatever occasion they have, either by profit or pleasure, to divert them, will yet pray five times every day. Yes, the very heathens sacrificed to Hercules morning and evening upon the great altar at Rome. Now, shall blind nature do more than grace? But,

[5.] Fifthly, Consider you cannot have too frequent communion with God, you cannot have too frequent fellowship with Jesus, you cannot have your hearts too frequently filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and with that peace that passes understanding, you cannot have heaven too frequently brought down into your hearts, nor you cannot have your hearts too frequently carried up to heaven; and therefore you cannot be too frequent in closet prayer. But,

[6.] Sixthly, Consider that you are under frequent needs, and frequent sins, and frequent snares, and frequent temptations, and frequent allurements, and frequent trials, and frequent cares, and frequent fears, and frequent favors, 1Pe_5 8, Job_1 7; and therefore you had need be frequent with God in your closets. But,

[7.] Seventhly, Consider you are the favorites of heaven, you are greatly beloved, you are highly honored, you are exceedingly esteemed and valued in the court of the Most High God. And remember, that the petitions of many weak Christians, and of many benighted Christians, and of many tempted Christians, and of many clouded Christians, and of many staggering Christians, and of many doubting Christians, and of many bewildered Christians, and of many fainting Christians, etc., are put into your hands, for a quick and speedy despatch to the throne of grace; so that you had need be frequent in your closets, and improve your interest in heaven, or else many of these poor hearts may be wronged, betrayed, and prejudiced by your neglect. Such as are favorites in princes' courts, if they are active, diligent, careful, and watchful, they may do much good for others, they may come as often as they please into their prince's presence, and with Queen Esther have for asking what they please, both for themselves and others, Esther 7.

Oh what a world of good may such do for others, if they would be but frequent with God in their closets! O sirs! if you have not that love, that regard, that pity, that compassion to your own souls, as you should have—yet, oh let not others suffer by your neglect of private prayer! Oh, let not Zion suffer! Oh, let not any particular saint suffer by your being found seldom in your closets.

Certainly, it might have gone better with the churches of Christ, and with the concernments of Christ, and with many of the poor people of Christ, if most Christians had been more frequent with God in their closets. But,

[8.] Eighthly and lastly, Consider that this liberty to approach near to God in your closets, cost Christ his dearest blood, Eph_2 13; Heb_10 20. Now, he who is not frequent with God in his closet, tells all about him, that he sets no great value upon that liberty which Christ has purchased with his blood. The incomparable, the unparalleled price which Christ has paid down upon the nail, above sixteen hundred years ago, that we might have liberty and free access to his Father in our closets, argues very strongly, yes, irrefragably, the superlative excellency of that liberty, 1Pe_1 19. Oh therefore let us improve to purpose this blessed purchase of our Lord Jesus, by being frequent with God in our closets.

O sirs! shall Christ shed not only a few drops of blood—but his very heart blood, to purchase you a freedom and liberty to be as often in your closets with his Father as you please; and will you only now and then give God a visit in private? The Lord forbid!

(2.) My second advice and counsel is this, **Take the fittest seasons and opportunities that possibly you can for closet prayer.** Many take unfit seasons for private prayer, which more obstruct the importunity of the soul in prayer, than all the suggestions and instigations of Satan. As,

First, **When the body is drowsy and sleepy**; this is a very unfit season for closet prayer, Son_3 1. Take heed of laying cushions of sloth under your knees, or pillows of idleness under your elbows, or of mixing nods with your petitions, or of being drowsily devoted when you draw near to God in your closets.

Secondly, **When a man's head and heart is filled with worldly cares and distractions**; this is a very unfit season for closet-prayer, 1Co_7 35; Eze_33 31.

"Dinah, Leah's daughter whom she bore to Jacob, went out to see some of the young women of the area. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, a prince of the region, saw her, he took her and raped her." Gen_34 1-2. When Dinah must needs be gadding abroad to see fashions; Shechem meets with her, and rapes her. So when our hearts, Dinah-like, must needs be a-roving and gadding abroad after the things of the world, then Satan, the prince of the air, usually seizes upon us, commits a rape upon our souls, and either leads us off from prayer, or else he does so distract us from prayer, that it were better not to have prayed at all, than to have offered the sacrifice of foolish and distracted prayer.

I have read a story, how that one offered to give his horse to his fellow, upon condition he would but say the Lord's prayer, and think upon nothing but God; the offer was accepted, and he began, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be your name." But I must have the bridle too, said he. "No, nor the horse neither," said the other, for you have lost both already. The application is easy.

Certainly, the most free and lively season for closet-prayer is the mornings, before a man's spirit is blunted or cooled, deadened, damped, or flattened by worldly businesses. A man should speak with God in his closet, before he speaks with his worldly affairs and occasions. A man should say to all his worldly business, as Abraham said unto his young men, when he went to offer up his only Isaac, "Abide here, and I will go yonder and worship, and then return to you again." He who will attend closet prayer without distraction or disturbance, must not, first, slip out of the world into his closet—but he must first slip into his closet before he be compassed about with a crowd of worldly employments.

It was a precept of Pythagoras, that when we enter into the temple to worship God, we must not so much as speak or think of any worldly business, lest we make God's service an idle, perfunctory, and lazy recreation. The same I may say of closet-prayer.

Jerome complains very much of his distractions, dullness, and indisposedness to prayer, and chides himself thus, "What! do you think, that Jonah prayed thus when he was in the whale's belly; or Daniel when he was among the lions; or the thief when he was upon the cross?"

Thirdly, **When men or women are under rash and passionate distempers**, 1Ti_2 8. For when passions are up, holy affections are down, and this is a very unfit season for closet-prayer. Such prayers will never reach God's ear—which do not first warm our own hearts. In the Muscovy churches, if the minister mistakes in reading, or stammers in pronouncing his words, or speaks any word that is not well heard, the hearers do very much blame him, and are ready to take the book from him, as unworthy to read therein. And certainly God is no less offended with the giddy, rash, passionate, precipitate, and inconsiderate prayers of those who, without a deliberate understanding, do send their petitions to heaven in posthaste. Solomon's advice is worthy of all commendation and acceptance "Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty, to utter anything before God," Ecc_5 2; or as the Hebrew may be read, "Let not your heart through haste be so troubled or disturbed, as to tumble over, and throw out words without wisdom or premeditation." Good men are apt many times to be too hasty, rash, and unadvised in their prayers, complaints, and deprecations. Witness David, Job, Jeremiah, Jonah, and the disciples. [Psa_31 2-3; Psa_116 11; Job_10 1-3; Jer_18 15; Jer_18 18; Jon_4 2-4; Mat_20 20-21] There is no Christian like him, who does wisely and seriously weigh over his prayers and praises before he pours out his soul before the Lord. He never repents of his requests, who first duly deliberates what to request; but he who blurts out whatever lies uppermost, and who brings into the presence of God his rash, raw, tumultuary, and undigested petitions, confessions, complaints, etc., he does but provoke God, he does but brawl with God; instead of praying to him or wrestling with him. Suitors at court observe their fittest times and seasons of petitioning; they commonly take that very nick of time, when they have the king in a good mood, and so seldom come off but with good success.

Sometimes God strongly inclines the heart to closet-prayer; sometimes he brings the heart beforehand into a praying frame; sometimes both body and soul are more enlivened, quickened, raised, and divinely inflamed than at other times; sometimes conscience is more stirring, working, and tender, etc. **Oh, now strike while the iron is hot!** Oh now lay hold on all such blessed opportunities, by applying of yourself to private prayer. O sirs! can you take your fittest times, seasons, and opportunities for ploughing, and sowing, and reaping, and buying and selling, and eating, and drinking, and marrying, etc. And cannot you as well take your fittest times and seasons to seek the Lord in your closets? **Must the best God be put off with the least and worst of your time?** The Lord forbid. Neglect not the seasons of grace; slip not your opportunities for closet-prayer; thousands have lost their seasons and their souls together!

(3.) My third advice and counsel is this, **Be very careful that you do not perform closet duties, merely to still your consciences.** You must perform them out of conscience—but you must not perform them only to quiet conscience. Some have such a light set up in their understandings, that they cannot omit closet-prayer—but conscience is upon their backs, conscience is still upbraiding and disquieting of them; and therefore they are afraid to neglect closet-prayer, lest conscience should question, arraign, and condemn them for their neglects. Sometimes when men have greatly sinned against the Lord, conscience becomes impatient, and is still accusing, condemning, and terrifying of them; and now in these agonies they will run to their closets, and cry, and pray, and mourn, and confess, and bitterly bewail their transgressions—but all this is only to quiet their consciences. And sometimes they find upon their performance of closet-duties, that their consciences are a little allayed and quieted; and for this very end and purpose do they take up closet-prayer as a *charm* to allay their consciences. And when the storm is over, and their consciences quieted, then they lay aside closet-prayer—and are ready to transgress again.

O sirs! take heed of this, for this is but open hypocrisy, and will be bitterness in the end. He who performs closet-prayer only to bribe his conscience, that it may not be clamorous, or to stop the mouth of conscience that it may not accuse him for sin—he will at length venture upon such a trade, such a course of sinning against conscience, as will certainly turn his troubled conscience into a seared conscience, 2Ti_4 2. And a seared conscience is like a sleeping lion, when he awakes he roars, and tears his prey in pieces; and so will a seared conscience, when it is awakened, roar and tear the secure sinner in pieces.

All the mercy that *a seared, a benumbed conscience* does afford the sinner, when it does most befriend him, when it deals most seemingly kind with him, is this—that it will not cut, that it may kill; it will not convince, that it may confound; it will not accuse, that it may condemn; it will spare the sinner a while, that it may torment him forever; it will spare him here, that it may gnaw him hereafter; it will not strike until it is too late for the sinner to ward off the blow. Oh cruel mercy, to observe the sin, and let alone the sinner until the gates of mercy be shut upon him, and hell stands gaping to devour him Gen_4 7, "Sin lies at the door." The Hebrew word signifies to lie down, or couch, like some wild beast at the mouth of his cave, as if it were asleep—but indeed watches and wakes, and is ready to fly at all that come near it. O sirs! sin is rather lying down than dormant; it sleeps dog's sleep, that it may take the sinner at the greater advantage, and fly the more furiously in his face! But,

(4.) My fourth advice and counsel is this, **Take heed of resting upon closet-duties**, take heed of trusting in closet-duties. Noah's dove made use of her wings—but she did not trust in her wings—but in the ark; so you must make use of closet-duties—but you must not trust in your closet-duties—but in Jesus, of whom the ark was but a type. There are many that go a round of duties, as mill horses go their round in a mill, and rest upon them when they are done, using the means as mediators; and so fall short of Christ and heaven at once. Closet-duties rested in, will as eternally undo a man as the greatest and foulest enormities; open wickedness slays her thousands—but a secret resting upon duties slays her ten thousands. Multitudes bleed inwardly of this disease, and die forever. Open profaneness is the broad dirty way which leads to hell--but trusting in religious duties is a sure way, though a cleaner way to hell. Profane people and formal professors shall meet at last in the same hell. Ah, Christians! do not make closet-duties your money, lest you and your money perish together.

The phoenix gathers sweet odoriferous sticks in Arabia together, and then blows them with her wings and burns herself with them; so do many shining professors burn themselves by resting in their duties and services. You know, in Noah's flood all that were not in the ark, though they climbed up the tallest trees, and the highest mountains and hills—yet were really drowned; so let men climb up to this duty and that—yet, if they don't get into Christ, they will be really damned. It is not your duties—but your Christ, that must save you. If a man be not interested in Christ, he may perish with "Our Father" in his mouth. It is as natural to a man to rest in his duties as it is for him to rest in his bed.

This was Bernard's temptation, who, being a little assisted in duty, could stroke his own head with 'O Bernard, this was gallantly done, now cheer up yourself.' Ah, how apt is man, when he has been a little assisted, heated, melted, enlarged, etc., in a way of duty, to go away and stroke himself, and bless himself, and hug himself, and warm himself with the sparks, with the fire of his own kindling, Isa_50 11. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." Isa_64 6. "I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." Luk_18 12

Adam was to win life and wear it; he was to be saved by his doings "Do this and live," Gen_2 2. Hence it is that all his posterity are so prone to seek for salvation by doing Act_2 37; Act_16 30, "What shall we do to be saved?" and "good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Mar_10 17; Mar_10 20. Like father, like son. But if our own duties or doings were sufficient to save us, to what purpose did Christ leave his Father's bosom, and lay down his dearest life? etc. Closet-duties rested in may pacify conscience for a time—but this will not always hold. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb; yet could they not heal him, nor cure him of his wound," Hos_5 13. If we rest on closet-duties, or on anything else on this side Christ, we shall find them as weak as the Assyrian, or as Jareb; we shall find to our cost that they cannot help us nor heal us; they cannot comfort us nor cure us of our wounds. As creatures, so duties, were never true to any who have trusted in them. When the Israelites were in great distress, the Lord bids them go and cry unto the gods which they had chosen, and let them deliver you, says God, in the time of your tribulation, Jdg_10 14. O sirs! if, when you are under distress of conscience, or lying upon a dying bed, God should say to you, 'Go to your closet prayers and performances, that you have made and rested in, go to your closet tears that you have shed and rested in, and let them save you and deliver you; oh, what miserable saviors and comforters would they be unto you!'

Look! what the ark of God was to the Philistines, 1 Samuel 5, that closet-duties are to Satan; he trembles every time he sees a poor sinner go into his closet and come out of his closet, resting and glorying in Jesus, and not in his duties; but when he sees a poor creature confide in his closet-duties, and rest upon his closet-duties, then he rejoices, then he claps his hands and sings, 'Aha! so would I have it.'

Oh, rest not on anything on this side Jesus Christ! Say to your graces, say to your duties, say to your holiness, 'You are not my Savior, you are not my mediator; and therefore you are not to be trusted to, you are not to be rested in.' It is my duty to perform closet-duties—but it is my sin to rely upon them, or to put confidence in them; do them I must—but glory in them I must not. He who rests in his closet-duties, he makes a Savior of his closet-duties. Let all your closet-duties lead you to Jesus, and leave you more in communion with him, and in dependence upon him; and then thrice happy will you be, Heb_7 25. Let all your closet prayers and tears, your closet fastings and meltings, be a star to guide you to Jesus, a Jacob's ladder by which you may ascend into the bosom of eternal loves; and then you are safe forever.

Ah! it is sad to think, how most men have forgotten their resting-place, as the Lord complains Jer_50 6, "My people have been like lost sheep, their shepherds have caused them to go astray, and have turned them away to the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill, and forgotten their resting-place." Ah! how many poor souls are there, that wander from mountain to hill, from one duty to another, and here they will rest, and there they will rest, and all on this side their resting-place! O sirs! it is God himself that is your resting-place; it is his free grace, it is his special mercy, it is his infinite love that is your resting-place; it is the bosom of Christ, the favor of Christ, the satisfaction of Christ, and the pure, perfect, spotless, matchless, and glorious righteousness of Christ, that is your resting-place; and therefore say to all your closet duties and performances, Farewell; prayer, farewell; reading, farewell; fasting, farewell; tears, farewell; sighs and groans, farewell; meltings and humblings, I will never trust more to you, I will never rest more on you; but I will now return to my resting place, I will now rest only in God and Christ, I will now rest wholly in God and Christ, I will now rest forever in God and Christ.

It was the saying of a precious saint, that "He was more afraid of his religious duties, than of his sins. **For his duties often made him proud; his sins always made him humble**." But,

(5.) My fifth advice and counsel is this, **Labor to bring your hearts into all your closet prayers and performances.** Look that your tongues and your hearts keep time and tune. Psa_17 1, "Give ear to my prayer—it does not rise from deceitful lips." Heart and tongue must go together; word and work, lip and life, prayer and practice, must echo one to another, or else your prayers and your soul will be lost together. The labor of the lips, and the travail of the heart must go together.

The Egyptians of all fruits made choice of the peach to consecrate to their goddess, and for no other cause—but that the fruit thereof is like to one's heart, and the leaf to one's tongue. These very heathens in the worship of their gods, thought it necessary that men's hearts and tongues should go together. Ah, Christians! when in your closet duties your hearts and your tongues go together, then you make that sweet and delightful melody that is most acceptable and pleasing to the King of kings. **The very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of the soul before God**, 1Sa_1 15. Psa_42 4, "When I remember these things I pour out my soul in me." So the Israelites poured out their souls like water before the Lord. So the church "The desire of our soul is to your name, and to the remembrance of you. With my soul have I desired you in the night, yes, with my spirit within me will I seek you early," Isa_26 8-9. So Lam_3 41, "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." So Heb_10 22, "Let us draw near with a true heart," etc. So Rom_1 9, "For God is my witness, whom I serve in the spirit." 1Co_14 15, "I will pray with the spirit, and sing with the spirit." Php_3 3, "We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit."

Under the law the inward parts were only to be offered to God in sacrifice; the skin belonged to the priests. Whence we may easily gather, that truth in the inward parts, is that which is most pleasing in a sacrifice.

When the Athenians would know from the oracle the cause of their often defeats in battle, seeing they offered the choicest things they could get, in sacrifice to the gods, which their enemies did not; the oracle gave them this answer, that "the gods were better pleased with their inward supplication, than with all their outward pomp in costly sacrifices." Ah, sirs! **the reason why so many are so unsuccessful in their closet-duties and services, is because there is no more of their hearts in them.** No man can make sure work or happy work in prayer but he who makes heart work on it. When a man's heart is in his prayers, then great and sweet will be his returns from heaven. That is no true prayer in which the heart of the person bears no part. When the soul is separated from the body the man is dead; and so when the heart is separated from the lip in prayer, the prayer is dead.

The Jews at this day write upon the walls of their synagogues these words, 'a prayer without the heart, is like a body without a soul.'

In the law of Moses the priest was commanded to wash the inwards of the sacrifices in water; and this was done, says Philo, to teach us to keep our hearts and affections clean when we draw near to God. In all your closet-duties God looks first and most to your hearts "My son, give me your heart," Pro_23 26. It is not a piece, it is not a corner of the heart, which will satisfy the Maker of the heart; the heart is a treasure, a bed of spices, a royal throne wherein he delights. God looks not at the elegance of your prayers, to see how refined they are; nor yet at the geometry of your prayers, to see how long they are; nor yet at the arithmetic of your prayers, to see how many they are; nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor yet at the logic of your prayers; but at the sincerity of your prayers, how hearty they are. There is no prayer acknowledged, approved, accepted, recorded, or rewarded by God—but that wherein the heart is sincere.

The true mother would not have the child divided. As God loves a broken and a contrite heart, so he loathes a divided heart, Psa_51 17; Jas_1 8. God neither loves halting nor halving; he will be served truly and totally. The royal law is, "You shall love and serve the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul." Among the heathens, when the beasts were cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart, and if the heart was bad, the sacrifice was rejected. Verily, God rejects all those services and sacrifices, wherein the heart is bad, as you may see by comparing these Scriptures together. [Pro_21 27; Isa_1 11-12; Isa_29 13; Mat_15 7-9; Eze_33 30-33; Zec_7 4-6; 2Ch_25 1-2; Psa_78 36-37]

Prayer without the heart is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Prayer is only lovely and weighty, as the heart is in it, and no otherwise. It is not the lifting up of the voice, nor the wringing of the hands, nor the beating of the breasts, nor an affected tone, nor studied motions, nor seraphical expressions—but the stirrings of the heart, which God looks at in prayer. God hears no more than the heart speaks. If the heart be dumb, God will certainly be deaf. No prayer is accepted by God—but that which is the travail of the heart.

The same day Julius Caesar came to the imperial dignity, sitting in his golden chair, he offered a beast in sacrifice to the gods; but when the beast was opened, it was without a heart, which the soothsayers looked upon as an ill omen. It is a sad omen, that you will rather provoke the Lord than prevail with him, who are habitually heartless in your closet duties. Of the heart, God seems to say to us, as Joseph did to his brethren, concerning Benjamin, "You shall not see my face without it."

It was the speech of blessed Bradford, that "he would never leave a duty, until he had brought his heart into the frame of the duty. He would not leave confession of sin, until his heart was broken for sin. He would not leave petitioning for grace, until his heart was quickened and enlivened in a hopeful expectation of more grace. He would not leave thanksgiving, until his heart was enlarged with the sense of the mercies he enjoyed, and quickened in the return of praise."

(6.) My sixth advice and counsel is this, **Be fervent, be warm, be importunate with God in all your closet duties and performances.** Jas_5 16, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much;" or, as the Greek has it "the working prayer;" that is, such working prayer as sets the whole man on work, as sets all the faculties of the soul, and all the graces in the soul, at work. The word signifies such a working as notes the liveliest activity that can be. Certainly, all those usual phrases of *crying, wrestling,* and *striving* with God, which are scattered up and down in Scripture, do strongly argue that holy importunity and sacred violence that the saints of old have expressed in their addresses to God. [Psa_55 1; Psa_61 1; Psa_64 1; Psa_88 1; Psa_88 13; Psa_119 164; Jon_2 1-2; Joe_2 13; Psa_119 145; Psa_119 147; Psa_119 20] **Fervency feathers the wings of prayer, and makes them fly the swifter to heaven.** An arrow, if it be drawn up but a little way, flies not far; but if it be drawn up to the head, it will fly far, and pierce deeply so fervent prayer flies as high as heaven, and will certainly bring down blessings from thence.

Cold prayers call for a denial—but fervent prayers offer a sacred violence both to heaven and earth. Look! as in a painted fire there is no heat; so in a cold prayer there is no heat, no warmth, no omnipotency, no devotion, no blessing. Cold prayers are like arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds without wings they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Such prayers as have no heavenly fire in them, do always freeze before they reach as high as heaven. But fervent prayer is very prevalent with God. Act_12 5, "Peter, therefore, was kept in prison—but prayer was made without ceasing." The Greek word signifies instant prayer, earnest prayer, stretched out prayer. These gracious souls did in prayer strain and stretch themselves, as men do that are running in a race; they prayed with all the strength of their souls, and with all the fervency of their spirits; and accordingly they carried the day with God, as you may see in the following verses.

So Act_26 7, "They earnestly serve God day and night," or rather as the Greek has it, "in a stretched out manner, serving God day and night." They stretched out their hearts, their affections, their graces, to the utmost in prayer. In all your private retirements, do as these did. Rom_12 11, "Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The Greek word signifies seething hot. God loves to see his people zealous and warm in his service. Without fervency of spirit, no service finds acceptance in heaven. God loves that his people should be lively and active in his service. Rom_12 12, "Persistent in prayer;" or "continuing with all your might in prayer." It is a metaphor from hunting dogs, which will never give over the hunt until they have got their prize. Rom_15 30, "That you strive together with me, in your prayers to God for me;" "strive mightily, strive as champions strive, even to an agony," as the word imports. It is a military word, and notes such fervent wrestling or striving, as is for life and death.

Col_4 12, "Always laboring fervently for you in prayer." The Greek word which is here used, signifies to strive or wrestle, as those do who strive for mastery; it notes the vehemency and fervor of Epaphras' prayers for the Colossians. Look! as the wrestlers do bend, and writhe, and stretch, and strain every joint of their bodies, that they may be victorious; so Epaphras did bend, and writhe, and stretch, and strain every joint of his soul, if I may so speak—that he might be victorious with God upon the Colossians' account. So, when Jacob was with God alone, ah how earnest and fervent was he in his wrestlings with God, Gen_32 24-27; Hos_12 4-5. He wrestles and weeps, and weeps and wrestles; he tugs hard with God, he holds his hold, and he will not let God go, until as a prince he had prevailed with him. Fervent prayer is the soul's contention, the soul struggling with God; it is a sweating work, it is the sweat and blood of the soul, it is a laying out to the uttermost all the strength and powers of the soul. He who would gain victory over God in private prayer, must strain every string of his heart; he must, in beseeching God, besiege him, and so get the better of him; he must be like importunate beggars, that will not be put off with frowns, or silence, or sad answers. Those who would be masters of their requests, must, like the importunate widow, press God so far as to put him to a holy blush, as I may say with reverence they must with a holy impudence, as Basil speaks, make God ashamed to look them in the face, if he should deny the importunity of their souls.

Had Abraham had a little more of this impudence, says one, when he made suit for Sodom, it might have done well. Abraham brought down the price to ten righteous, and there his modesty stopped him; had he gone lower, God only knows what might have been done, for God went not away, says the text, "until he had left communing with Abraham," that is, until Abraham had no more to say to God. Abraham left over asking, before God left over granting; he left over praying, before God left over conceding; and so Sodom was lost.

Oh the heavenly fire, the holy fervency that was in Daniel's closet prayer! "O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name," Dan_9 19. Look! as there be two kinds of antidotes against poison, namely, hot and cold, so there are two kinds of antidotes against all the troubles of this life, namely, fervent prayers and holy patience the one hot, the other cold; the one quickening, and the other quenching, and holy Daniel made use of them both. Fervency to prayer, is as the fire was to the spices in the censer, or as wings to the bird, or as oil to the wheels; and this Daniel found by experience. God looks not for any James with horny knees, through assiduity of prayer; nor for any Bartholomew with a hundred prayers for the morning, and as many for the evening; but for fervency of spirit in prayer, which alone carries all with God. Feeble prayers, like weak pangs, go over, and never brings a mercy to the birth. Cold prayers are stillborn children, in whom the Father of spirits can take no pleasure. Look! as a painted man is no man, and as painted fire is no fire; so a cold prayer is no prayer. Such prayers never win upon the heart of God, which do not first warm our own hearts. As a body without a soul, much wood without a fire, a bullet in a gun without powder; so are all prayers without fervency of spirit.

Luther terms prayer, the gun or cannon of Christians, or the Christian's gunshot.

The hottest springs send forth their waters by ebullitions. Cold prayers make a smoke in the eyes of God. Lazy prayers never procure noble answers; lazy beggars may starve for all their begging, Isa_1 15, and Isa_65 5.

Such as have a male in their flock, and offer to the Lord a female; such as offer to the Lord the torn, and the lame, and the sick; such as turn off God with their cold, lazy, sleepy, and formal devotions—are condemned, cast out, and cursed by God, Mal_1 13-14. David compares his prayers to incense, and no incense was offered without fire, Psa_141 2; it was the *fire*, which made the smoke of it to ascend. It is only fervent prayer which hits the mark, and which pierces the walls of heaven, though, like those of Gaza, Isa_45 2, made of brass and iron.

While the child only whimpers and whines in the cradle, the mother lets it alone; but when once it pitches up its note, and cries outright, then she runs and takes it up. So it is with a Christian Psa_34 6, "This poor man cried." There is his fervency, he cried; but it was silently and secretly, in the presence of King Achish, as Moses did at the Red Sea, and as Nehemiah did in the presence of the king of Persia. "And the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles;" here is his prevalency. So Latimer plied the throne of grace with great fervency, crying out, "Once again, Lord, once again restore the gospel to England," and God heard him.

Hudson the martyr, having prayed fervently, he was comforted immediately, and suffered valiantly.

I have read of one Giles of Bruxels, a Dutch martyr, who was so fervent in his prayer, kneeling by himself in some secret place of the prison where he was, that he seemed to forget himself; and being called to his food, he neither heard nor saw who stood by him, until he was lifted up by the arms, and then he spoke gently to them, as one awaked out of a trance.

So Gregory Nazianzen, speaking of his sister Gorgonia, says, that, in the vehemency of her prayer, she came to a religious impudency with God, so as to threaten heaven, and tell God that she would never depart from his altar until she had her petition granted.

Let us make it our business to follow these noble examples, as ever we would so prince it in prayer as to prevail with God. An importunate soul in prayer is like the poor beggar, who prays and knocks, who prays and waits, who prays and works, who knocks and knocks, who begs and pleads—and will not stir from the door until he has an alms. Well, friends, remember this, God respects no more lukewarm prayers than he does lukewarm people, and they are such that he has threatened to spue out of his mouth. Those prayers that are but lip-labor are lost labor; and therefore, in all your closet prayers, look to the fervency of your spirits.

(7.) My seventh advice and counsel is this, **Be constant, as well as fervent, in closet-prayer.** Look that you hold on and hold out, and that you persevere to the end in private prayer 1Th_5 17, "Pray without ceasing." A man must always pray habitually, though not actually; he must have his heart in a praying disposition in all states and conditions. Though closet-prayer may have an intermission—yet it must never have a cessation Luk_18 1, "And he spoke a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint," or, as the Greek has it, not to shrink back, as sluggards in work, or cowards in war.

Closet-prayer is a fire like that on the altar, which was never to go out, day nor night 1Th_3 10, "Night and day praying exceedingly." Paul speaks like a man made up all of prayer, like a man who minded nothing so much as prayer so Eph_6 18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Calvin makes this difference between "praying always" in the beginning of this verse, and "praying with perseverance" in the end of this verse "By *praying always*," says he, "he exhorts us to pray in prosperity as well as in adversity, and not to quit the duty of prayer in a prosperous estate, because we are not driven to it by outward pressing necessities and miseries; and by *praying with perseverance*, he admonishes us that we be not weary of the work—but continue instant and constant in its performance, though we have not presently what we pray for." So that "praying always" is opposed to a neglect of the duty in its proper times and seasons, and "praying with perseverance" is opposed to a fainting in our spirits, in respect of this or that particular suit or request that we put up to God.

When God turns a deaf ear to our prayers, we must not fret nor faint, we must not be dismayed nor discouraged—but we must hold up and hold on in the duty of prayer with invincible patience, courage, and constancy, as the church did Lam_3 8; Lam_3 44; Lam_3 55-57, compared; Col_4 2, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." We must be constant and instant in closet prayer; we must wait upon it, and lay all aside for it. He who is only in his closet by fits and starts, will neither glorify God nor advantage his own soul. If we do not make a trade of closet-prayer, we shall never make any earnings of closet-prayer.

Look! as those who get money by their iron mills do keep a continual fire in their iron mills; just so, those who will get any soul-good by closet duties, they must keep close and constant to closet duties. The hypocrite is only constant in inconstancy; he is only in his closet by fits and starts. Now and then, when he is in a good mood, you shall find him step into his closet—but he never holds it Job_27 10, "Will he always call upon God," or, as the Hebrew has it, "Will he in every time call upon God?" When they are under the smarting rod, or when they are upon the tormenting rack, or when they are under grievous needs, or when they are struck with panic-fears, etc., then you shall have them run to their closets, as Joab ran to the horns of the altar, when he was in danger of death; but they never persevere, they never hold out to the end; and therefore in the end they lose both their closet prayers and their souls together, Isa_26 16; Psa_78 34; Zec_7 5.

It was a most profane and blasphemous speech of that atheistical wretch, who told God "that he was no common beggar, and that he never troubled him before with prayer, and if God would but hear him that one time, he would never trouble him again."

Closet-prayer is a hard work; and a man must tug hard at it, and stick close to it, as Jacob did, if ever he intends to make any internal or eternal advantages by it, Genesis 32. Daniel chose rather to run the hazard of his life, than to give over praying in his chamber, Daniel 6. It is not he who begins in the spirit and ends in the flesh, Gal_3 3; it is not he who puts his hand to the plough and looks back, Luk_9 62; but he who perseveres to the end in prayer, who shall be saved and crowned, Mat_24 13. It is he who perseveres in well doing, who shall eat of the hidden manna, and who shall have the white stone, "and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows, but him who receives it," Rev_2 17.

Those precious, praying, mourning souls in Eze_9 4; Eze_9 6, who were marked to be preserved in Jerusalem, were distinguished, say some of the learned, by the character *t, tau,* which is the last of all the Hebrew letters, to teach them that they must hold out and hold on to the end in well doing. It is constancy in closet-duty which crowns the Christian and commends the duty.

Objection—But would God have his people to cast off their callings, and to cast off all care of their relations, and shut themselves up in their closets, and there spend their whole time in secret prayer? Oh, no! Every duty must have its time and place; and as one friend must not shut out another, so one duty must not shut out another, Ecc_3 1. The duties of my particular calling as a *man*, must not shut out the duties of my general calling as a *Christian*; neither must the duties of my general calling as a Christian, shut out the duties of my particular calling as a man. But that you may be fully satisfied in this case, you must remember that **a man may be said to pray always**,

[1.] First, **When his heart is always in a praying frame.** Look! as a man may be truly said to give always, whose heart is always in a giving frame; and to suffer always, whose heart is always in a suffering frame—"For your sake are we killed all the day long," Psa_44 22; and to sin always, whose heart is always in a sinning frame, 2Pe_2 14; Jer_9 3, so a man may be as truly said to pray always, whose heart is always in a praying frame.

[2.] Secondly, A man prays always **when he takes hold on every fit season and opportunity for the pouring out of his soul before the Lord in his closet**. To pray always is to pray in every opportunity; but this has been addressed before.

If we continue constant in our closet-wrestlings with God, if we hold on in private prayer though God should appear to us in the form or shape of a judge, an enemy, a stranger—we shall certainly triumph at last "O woman, great is your faith, be it unto you even as you will; and her daughter was made whole from that very hour," Mat_15 28.

The philosopher being asked in his old age why he did not give over his practice and take his ease, answered, "When a man is to run a race of forty furlongs, would you have him sit down at the 39th, and so lose the prize, the crown for which he ran?" O sirs! if you hold not out to the end in closet-prayer, you will certainly lose the heavenly prize, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory. To continue in giving glory to God in this way of duty, is as necessary and requisite as to begin to give glory to God in this way of duty; for though the beginning be more than half—yet the end is more than all. The God of all perfections looks that our ultimate end should be his optimum glory; that our last works should be our best works; and that we should persevere in closet-prayer to the end, Rev_2 10.

(8.) My eighth advice and counsel is this, **In all your closet prayers, thirst and long after communion with God.** In all your private retirements, rest in nothing below fellowship with God, in nothing below a sweet and spiritual enjoyment of God, Son_3 1-3; Psa_73 28. Psa_27 4, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." The temple of the Lord, without communion with the Lord of the temple, will not satisfy David's soul.

Psa_42 1-2, "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?" The deer, as Aristotle and others observe, is of all creatures most hot and dry of itself; but especially when it is chased and hunted, then it is extreme thirsty. The female is here meant, as the Greek article does manifest. Now, in the females the passions of thirst are more strong, as the naturalists observe. By this David discovers what a vehement and inflamed thirst there was in his soul after communion with God; and as nothing could satisfy the hunted deer but the water brooks, so nothing could satisfy his soul but the enjoyments of God.

Psa_43 4, "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy." The altar of God is here put for the worship of God. Now, it is not barely the worship of God—but communion with God in his worship, that was David's exceeding joy. Psa_63 1-3, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." David's soul did not thirst after a crown, a kingdom, or any worldly greatness or glory—but after a choice and sweet enjoyment of God in his wilderness estate. Never did any woman with child long more after this or that, than David's soul did long to enjoy sensible communion with God in the midst of all his sorrows and sufferings.

Psa_84 2, "My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God." By the "courts of the Lord," we are to understand the ordinances. Now, these without communion with God would never have satisfied David's soul. I commend that speech of Bernard, "I never come from God, without God."

Whenever you go into your closets, press hard after real and sensible communion with God, that so you may come out of your closets with some shines of God upon your spirits, as Moses came down from the mount with his face shining, Exo_34 29-35. Oh, labor and long to enjoy that inward and close fellowship with God in your closets, as may leave such a choice and sweet savor of God, both upon your hearts and lives, as others may be forced to say, "Surely these have been with Jesus," Act_4 13. It is sad when Christians return from their closets to their shops, their trades, their families, their commerce, etc., without the least visible rays of divine glory upon them.

O sirs! closet-prayer will be found to be but a dry, sapless, lifeless, heartless, comfortless thing, if you do not enjoy communion with God in it. **Communion with God is the very life, soul, and crown of all your closet duties**; and therefore press after it as for life. When you go into your closets, let everything go which may hinder your fruition of Christ; and let everything be embraced, which makes way for your enjoyment of Christ. Oh let closet-prayer be a golden bridge, a chariot to convey your souls over to God, and to bring you into a more intimate communion with God. Let no closet duty satisfy you or content you, wherein you have not conversed with God, as a child converses with his father, or as a wife converses with her husband, or as a friend converses with his friend, even face to face. Nothing speaks out more unsoundness, falseness, and baseness of heart than this—when men make duty the end of duty; prayer the end of prayer; than when men can begin a duty, and go on in a duty, and close up a duty, and bless and stroke themselves after a duty, and yet never enjoy the least communion with God in the duty!

Question. **But how shall a man know when he has a real communion with God in a duty or not?** This is a very noble and necessary question, and accordingly it calls for a clear and satisfactory answer; and therefore thus

Solution [1.] First, **A man may have communion with God in sorrow and tears, when he has not communion with God in joy, delight**, Psa_51 17. A man may have communion with God in a heart-humbling, a heart-melting, and a heart-abasing way—when he has not communion with God in a heart-reviving, a heart-cheering, and a heart-comforting way. It is a very great mistake among many tender-hearted Christians, to think that they have no communion with God in their closets, except they meet with God embracing and kissing, cheering and comforting up their souls (Son_2 4-6). When they find God raising the springs of joy and comfort in their souls; when they find God a-speaking peace unto them; when they find the singular sensible presence of God cheering, refreshing, and enlarging of them in their closets—oh then they are willing to grant that they have had sweet communion with God in their closets. But if God meets with them in their closets, and only breaks their hearts *for* sin, and *from* sin; if he meets with them and only makes his power and his presence manifest—in debasing and casting down of their souls, upon the sight and sense of their strong corruptions and many imperfections, how unwilling are they to believe that they have had any communion with God!

Well, friends, remember this once for all, namely, that **a Christian may have as real communion with God in a heart-humbling way, as he can have in a heart-comforting way**. A Christian may have as choice communion with God when his eyes are full of tears, as he can have when his heart is full of joy, Joh_20 11-19. Sometimes God meets with a poor Christian in his closet, and exceedingly breaks him and humbles him; and at other times he meets with the same Christian in his closet, and mightily cheers him, and comforts him. Sometimes God meets with a poor soul in his closet, and there he sweetly quiets him and stills him; and at other times he meets with the same soul in his closet, and then he greatly revives him and quickens him. God does not always come upon the soul one way, he does not always come in at one and the same door, Joh_3 8. We sometimes look for a friend to come in at the front-door, and then he comes in at the back-door; and at other times, when we look for him at the back-door, then he comes in at the front-door; and just so it is with God's coming into his people's souls. Sometimes they go into their closets, and look that God will come in at the front-door of joy and comfort; and then God comes in at the back-door of sorrow and grief. And at other times, when they look that God should come in at the back-door of humiliation, breaking, and melting their hearts; then God comes in at the front-door of joy and consolation, cheering and rejoicing their souls. But,

[2.] Secondly, I answer, That **all Christians do not enjoy a like communion with God in their closets**. Some enjoy much communion with God in their closets, and others enjoy but little communion with God in their closets. Moses had a more clear, glorious, and constant communion with God in his days, than any others had in those times wherein he lived, Exo_33 11; Deu_5 4; Num_12 7-8. God spoke to none "face to face," as he did to Moses. And Abraham, Genesis 18, in his time, had a more close, friendly, and intimate communion with God, than holy Lot, or any others had in that day. And though all the disciples, Judas excepted, had sweet communion with Christ in the days of his flesh—yet Peter, James, and John had a more clear, choice, and full communion with him than the rest had, Mat_17 1-4. Among all the disciples John had most bosom-communion with Christ, he was the greatest favorite in Christ's court, he leaned on Christ's bosom, he could say anything to Christ, and he could know anything of Christ, and he could have anything from Christ, Joh_13 23; Joh_20 2, and Joh_21 20. **Now that all Christians do not enjoy communion with God alike in their closets, may be thus made evident**

First, **All Christians do not prepare alike to enjoy closet-communion with God**; and therefore all Christians do not enjoy communion with God alike in their closets, Ecc_5 1; Psa_10 17. Commonly he who prepares and fits himself most for closet-communion with God, he is the man who enjoys most closet-communion with God, 2Ch_30 17-20.

Secondly, **All Christians do not alike prize communion with God in their closets**. Some prize communion with God in their closets before all and above all other things; as that noble marquis said, "Cursed be he who prefers all the world, to one hour's communion with God." They look upon it as that pearl of price, for the enjoyment of which they are ready to sell all and part with all; others prize it at a lower rate, and so enjoy less of it than those who set a higher price and value upon it, Job_23 12; Psa_119 127; Mat_13 45-46.

Thirdly, **All Christians do not alike press after communion with God in their closets**. Some press after communion with God in their closets, as a condemned man presses after a pardon, or as a prisoner presses after freedom, or as a poor beggar presses after alms, Psa_33 8; Isa_26 8-9. Now, you know these press on with the greatest earnestness, the greatest fervency, and the greatest importunity imaginable. But others press after communion with God in their closets more coldly, more carelessly, more slightly, more lazily "I have taken off my robe-- must I put it on again? I have washed my feet-- must I soil them again?" Son_5 3. Now, those who press hardest after communion with God in their closets, they are usually blessed with the highest degrees of closet-communion with God.

Fourthly, **All Christians don't alike improve their communion with God in their closets**; and therefore all Christians don't enjoy communion with God alike in their closets. Some Christians do make a more wise, a more humble, a more holy, a more faithful, a more fruitful, and a more constant improvement of their closet-communion with God than others do; and therefore they are blessed with higher degrees of communion with God than others are. Some Christians do more improve their closet-communion with God against the world, the flesh, and the devil, than others do; and therefore no wonder if they do enjoy more communion with God in their closets than others do.

Fifthly, **All Christians do not alike need communion with God in their closets**; and therefore all Christians have not a like communion with God in their closets. All Christians have not a like place in the mystical body of Christ, 1Co_12 14, seq.; some rule, and others are ruled. Now, every man stands in more or less need of communion with God, according to the place that he bears in the body of Christ. Again, all Christians have not alike burdens to bear, nor alike difficulties to encounter with, nor alike dangers to escape, nor alike temptations to wrestle with, nor alike passions and corruptions to mortify, nor alike mercies and experiences to improve, etc.; and therefore all Christians don't need alike communion with God in their closets. Now, commonly God lets himself out more or less in ways of communion, according as the various necessities and conditions of his people does require.

Sixthly and lastly, **All Christians do not alike meet with outward interruptions, nor inward interruptions**; and therefore all Christians have not alike communion with God in their closets. Some Christians meet with a world of outward and inward interruptions more than others do; some Christians' outward callings, relations, conditions, and stations, etc., do afford more plentiful matter and occasions, to interrupt them in their closet-communion with God, than other Christians' callings, relations, conditions, and stations do, etc.

Besides, **Satan** is more busy with some Christians than he is with other Christians; and **corruptions** work more strongly and violently in some Christians than they do in other Christians, etc.; and let me add this to all the rest, that the very **natural tempers** of some Christians are more averse to closet-duties than the natural tempers of other Christians are; and therefore all Christians have not alike communion with God in their closets—but some have more and some have less, according as God in his infinite wisdom sees best.

Now, let no Christian say, that he has no communion with God in closet-prayer, because he has not such a full, such a choice, such a sweet, such a sensible, and such a constant communion with God in closet-prayer—as such and such saints have had, or as such and such saints now have; for all saints do not alike enjoy communion with God in their closets some have more, some have less; some have a higher degree, others a lower; some are enrapt up in the third heaven, when others are but enrapt up in the clouds. What man is there so childish and babyish as to argue thus, that he has no *wisdom*, because he has not the wisdom of Solomon; or, that he has no *strength*, because he has not the strength of Samson; or, that he has no *life*, because he has not the swiftness of Ahimaaz; or, that he has no *estate*, because he has not the riches of Dives?

And yet so childish and babyish many weak Christians are, as to argue thus namely, that they have no communion with God in their closets, because they have not such high, such comfortable, and such constant communion with God in their closets, as such and such saints have had, or as such and such saints now have! Whereas they should seriously consider, that though some saints have a great communion with God—yet other saints have but a small communion with God; and though some Christians have a strong communion with God—yet other Christians have but a weak communion with God; and though some Christians have a very close and near communion with God—yet other Christians have but a more remote communion with God; and though some of God's servants have a daily, constant, and uninterrupted communion with God—yet others of his servants have but a more transient and inconstant communion with God. But,

[3.] Thirdly, I answer, **When a man acts grace in closet-duties, then certainly he has communion with God in closet-duties**, 2Ti_1 17; 1Ti_2 8. When a man in closet-duties acts **faith** in God, or faith in the promises, or faith in the blood of Christ; or when a man in private duties acts **repentance** for sin, or **love** to Jesus Christ, or sets up God as the object of his **holy fear**, or as the object of his **joy**, etc., then he has communion with God, then he has fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, 1Jn_1 3.

An unregenerate man may act gifts and abilities in a duty—but he cannot act grace in a duty; for no man can act grace in a duty—but he who has grace in his soul; and hence it comes to pass that unsanctified people under the highest activity of their arts, parts, and gifts in religious duties, enjoy no communion with God at all; witness the scribes and pharisees, Demas, Judas, Simon Magus, etc., Isa_1 11-13. As ever you would have an evidence of your communion with God in closet-duties, carefully look to the activity of your graces, carefully stir up the grace of God which is in you, 2Ti_1 6. But,

[4.] Fourthly, I answer, **When a man has communion with God in his closet, then he gives God the glory of all his actings and activities**, Psa_115 1. Communion with God always helps a man to set *the crown of praise and honor* upon the head of God. Witness that gracious and grateful doxology of David and his people, in that 1Ch_29 13, "Now therefore, our God, we thank you, and praise your glorious name." Men who enjoy no communion with God in religious duties, are still a-sacrificing unto their own net, and a-burning incense unto their own dragnet, Hab_1 16; they are still a blessing themselves, and a-stroking of themselves, and applauding themselves; they think the garland of praise, the crown of honor, befits no head but their own, Luk_18 11-12.

But now, men that enjoy communion with God in religious duties, they will uncrown themselves to crown God, they will uncrown their duties—to crown the God of their duties; they will uncrown their arts, parts, gifts, and enlargements—to set the crown of praise upon the head of God alone, Act_3 11-13; Act_3 16; Rev_4 10-11; Rev_5 11-12.

You think that you have communion with God in closet-duties, yes, you say that you have communion with God in closet-duties; but on whose head do you put the garland of praise? Psa_148 13. If on God's head, you have communion with God; if on your own head, you have no communion with God. As all the rivers run into the sea, and all the lines meet in the center—so, when all our closet-duties terminate and center in the advance of God's glory, then have we communion with God in them.

Constantine used to write the name of Christ over his door. When a man has communion with Christ in a duty, then he will write the name of Christ, the honor of Christ, upon his duty. Some say that the name of Jesus was engraved upon the heart of Ignatius; sure I am, when a man has communion with God in a duty, then you shall find the honor and glory of Jesus engraved upon that duty. But,

[5.] Fifthly, I answer, **When the performance of closet-duties leaves the soul in a better frame—then a man has communion with God in them.** When a man comes off from closet-duties in a more **holy** frame, or in a more **humble** frame, or in a more **spiritual** frame, or in a more **watchful** frame, or in a more **heavenly** frame, or in a more **broken** frame, or in a more **quickened** and **enlivened** frame, etc.—then certainly he has had communion with God in those duties. When a man comes out of his closet, and finds the frame of his heart to be more strongly set against sin than ever, and to be more highly resolved to walk with God than ever, and to be more eminently crucified to the world then ever, and to be more divinely fixed against temptations than ever—then without all question, he has had communion with God in his closet.

[6.] Sixthly, I answer, **When closet-duties fit a man for those other duties** that lie next at hand, then doubtless he has had communion with God in them. When private duties fit a man for public duties, or when private duties fit a man for the duties of his place, calling, and condition, wherein God has set him—then certainly he has had fellowship with God in them, Ecc_9 10. When a man in closet duties finds more spiritual strength and power to perform the duties that are incumbent upon him, then assuredly he has met with God. When private prayer fits me more for family prayer, or public prayer—then I may safely conclude that God has drawn near to my soul in private prayer. When one closet duty fits me for another closet duty, as when praying fits me for Scripture reading, or reading for praying; or when the more external duties in my closet, namely, reading or praying, fits me for those more spiritual and internal duties, namely, self-examination, holy meditation, soul-humiliation, etc., then I may rest satisfied that there has been some choice fellowship between God and my soul.

When the more I pray in my closet, the more fit I am to pray in my closet; and the more I read in my closet, the more fit I am to read in my closet; and the more I meditate in my closet, the more fit I am to meditate in my closet; and the more I search and examine my heart in my closet, the more fit I am to search and examine my heart in my closet; and the more I humble and abase my soul in my closet, the more fit I am to humble and abase my soul in my closet then I may be confident that I have had communion with God in my closet.

08 Eleven advices and counsels contd

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[7.] Seventhly, I answer, That **all private communion with God is very soul-humbling and soul-abasing.** **Abraham** was a man who had much private communion with God, and a man who was very vile and low in his own eyes Gen_18 27, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes." In respect of my *nature*, says Abraham, I am but base dust and ashes; and in respect of my *deserts*, I deserve to be burnt to ashes. There are none so humble as those who have nearest communion with God, Gen_28 10-18. **Jacob** was a man who had much private communion with God—and a man who was very little in his own eyes Gen_22 10, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which you have showed unto your servant;" or, as the Hebrew has it, "I am less than all your mercies." When Jacob had to deal with Laban, he pleads his merit but when he has to do with God, he debases himself below the least of his mercies, Gen_31 38-41. **Moses** was a man who had much private communion with God, as I have formerly evidenced, and a man who was the meekest and humblest person in all the world Num_12 3, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth." And so, when the glory of God appeared to Moses, he falls upon his face, Num_16 22, in token of humility and self-abasing.

David was a man who had much private communion with God, as is granted on all hands; and how greatly does he debase himself and vilify himself! 1Sa_26 20, "The king of Israel has come out to seek a flea;" and what more weak and contemptible than a flea? So 1Sa_24 14, "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom do you pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea?" As if David had said, "It is not worth the while, the labor; it is below the dignity and honor of the king of Israel to take such pains and to pursue so violently after such a poor nothing as I am, who has no more strength nor power to bite or hurt than a dead dog or a poor flea has." So Psa_22 6, "But I am a worm, and no man." Now, what is more weak, what less regarded, what more despicable, what more trampled under foot than a poor worm? The Hebrew word which is here rendered worm, signifies a very little worm, which are so little that a man can scarcely see them, or perceive them. Thus you see that holy David debases himself below a worm, yes, below the least of worms. **No man sets so low a value upon himself, as he does who has most private communion with God.**

The twenty-four elders cast down their crowns at the feet of Jesus Christ, Rev_4 10-11. Their crowns note all their inward and outward dignities, excellencies, and glories; and the casting down of their crowns notes their great humility and self-debasement. When Christians, in their closets and out of their closets, can cast down their crowns, their duties, their services, their graces, their enlargements, their enjoyments, etc., at the feet of Jesus Christ, and sit down debasing and lessening of themselves, then certainly they have had a very near and sweet communion with God.

Austin being once asked what was the first grace, answered, humility; what the second, humility; what the third, humility.

Chrysostom has a remarkable saying of humility "Suppose," says he, "that a man were defiled with all manner of sin and enormity—yet humble; and another man enriched with gifts, graces, and duties—yet proud; the humble sinner were in a safer condition than this proud saint."

When a man can come off from closet-duties, and say, as Ignatius once said of himself, 'I am not worthy to be called the least,' then certainly he has had fellowship with God in them. All the communion that the creature has with God in his closet is very soul-humbling and soul-abasing. In all a man's communion with God, some beams, some rays of the glory and majesty of God, will shine forth upon his soul. Now all divine manifestations are very humbling and abasing, as you may clearly see in those two great instances of Job and Isaiah Job_42 5-6 "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear—but now my eye sees you Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Isa_6 1; Isa_6 5, "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." What sweet communion had Elijah with God in the low cave!

There was a gentlewoman, of no ordinary quality or breeding, who, being much troubled in mind, and sadly deserted by God, could not be drawn by her husband, or any other Christian friends, either to hear or read anything that might work for her spiritual advantage. At last her husband, by much importunity, prevailed so far with her, that she was willing he should read one chapter in the Bible to her; so he read Isaiah 57, and when he came to Isa_57 15, "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." Oh, says she, is it so, that God dwells with a contrite and humble spirit? Then I am sure he dwells with me, for my heart is broken into a thousand pieces. Oh happy text and happy time, that ever I should hear such comfort! and she was thereupon recovered. The more communion any man has with God, the more humble and broken his heart will be.

Holy Bradford was a man who had much private communion with God, and he would many times subscribe himself in his letters, "John the hypocrite, and a very painted sepulcher." Agur was one of the wisest and holiest men on the earth in his days, and he condemned himself for being more brutish than any man, and not having the understanding of a man, Pro_30 2. How sweet is the smell of the lowly violet, which hides his head, above all the gaudy tulips that be in your garden. The lowly Christian is the most amiable and the most lovely Christian. When a man can come out of his closet, and cry out with Augustine, "I hate that which I am, and love and desire that which I am not. O wretched man who I am, in whom the cross of Christ has not yet eaten out the poisonous and the bitter taste of the first tree." Or, as another says, "Lord, I see, and yet am blind; I will, and yet rebel; I hate, and yet I love; I follow, and yet I fall; I press forward—yet I faint; I wrestle—yet I halt;" then he may be confident that he has had communion with God in his closet. He who comes off from closet-duties in a self-debasing way, and in laying of himself low at the foot of God, he certainly has had communion with God; but when men come out of their closets with their hearts swelled and lifted up, as the hearts of the pharisees were, Luk_18 11-12, it is evident that they have had no communion with God. God has not been near to their souls, who say, 'stand by yourself, come not near to me, for I am holier than you.' Isa_65 5. But,

[8.] Eighthly, and lastly, **When a man finds such a secret virtue and power running through his closet-duties—as wounds and weakens his beloved corruption**, as breaks the strength and the power of his special sin, as sets his heart more fully, resolutely, and constantly against his darling lust, as stirs up a greater rage, and a more bitter hatred, and a more fierce indignation against the toad in the bosom—then certainly he has had communion with God in his closet-duties. Consult these scriptures

Isa_2 20, "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they have made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats." In the day wherein God should take these poor hearts into communion with himself, their hearts should be filled with such rage and indignation against their most delectable and desirable idols, that they should take not only those made of trees and stones—but even their most precious and costly idols, those who were made of silver and gold, and cast them to the moles and to the bats, to note their horrible hatred and indignation against them. Idolatry was the darling-sin of the Jews; their hearts were so exceedingly affected and delighted with their idols, that they did not care what they spent upon them Isa_46 6, "They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a God they fall down, yes, they worship it." The word here used for lavish, in the Hebrew, signifies properly to waste, or spend riotously; they set so light by their treasure, that they cared not what they spent upon their idols. God gave them gold and silver as pledges of his favor and bounty, and they lavish it out upon their idols, as if God had hired them to be wicked.

Oh, but when God should come and take these poor wretches into a close and near communion with himself, then you shall find their wrath and rage to rise against their idols, as you may see in that Isa_30 19-21. Their communion with God is more than hinted; but mark, Isa_30 22, "Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them—Away with you!" None defile, deface, detest, and disgrace their idols like those who are taken into communion with God. Fellowship with God will make a man cast away, as a menstruous cloth, those very idols, in which he has most delighted, and with which he has been most pleased and enamored.

Idols were Ephraim's bosom-sin. Hos_4 17, "Ephraim is joined," or glued, as the Hebrew has it, "to idols; let him alone." Oh! but when you find Ephraim taken into close communion with God, as you do in that Hos_14 4-7, then you shall find another spirit upon him Hos_14 8, "Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols?" I have had too much to do with them already, I will never have to do with them any more. Oh! how does my soul detest and abhor them, and rise up against them. Oh! how do I now more loathe and abominate them, than ever I have formerly loved them, or delighted in them. After the return of the Jews out of Babylon, they so hated and abhorred idols, that in the time of the Romans they chose rather to die, than allow the eagle, which was the imperial insignia, to be set up in their temple.

Though closet-duties are weak in themselves—yet when a man has communion with God in them, then they prove exceeding powerful to the casting down of strongholds, and vain imaginations, and every high thing and thought, which exalts itself against the knowledge of God, 2Co_10 4-5. When a man comes out of his closet with a heart more fully and steadfastly set against every known sin—but especially against his bosom-sin, his darling-sin, his Delilah which he played and sported himself most with, and which he has hugged with pleasure and delight in his bosom—then certainly he has had private communion with God.

After Moses had enjoyed forty days' private communion with God in the mount, how did his heart rise, and his anger wax hot against the molten calf that his people had made! Exo_32 19-20, "When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it." Moses had never more intimate fellowship with God than now, and he never discovered so much holy zeal, anger, and indignation against sin as now.

When a man comes off from the mount of closet-duties with a greater hatred, anger, wrath, and indignation against bosom-sins, darling-sins, complexion-sins, which were once as dear to him as right hands or right eyes, or as Delilah was to Samson, or Herodias to Herod, or Isaac to Abraham, or Joseph to Jacob, then certainly he has had communion with God in those duties. When a man finds his beloved sins, his Delilahs, which, like the prince of devils, command all other sins, to fall before his closet-duties, as Dagon fell before the ark, or as Goliath fell before David—then assuredly he has had fellowship with God in them.

Pliny writes of some families which had secret marks on their bodies, peculiar to those of that line. Certainly, there are no people—but have some sin or sins; some secret marks on their souls, that may in a peculiar way be called theirs. Now when in private duties they find the bent of their hearts, and the purposes, resolutions, and inclinations of their souls more raised, inflamed, and set against these, they may safely and comfortably conclude, that they have had communion with God in them.

O sirs! **there is no no bosom-sin so sweet or profitable, that is worth burning in hell for, or worth shutting out of heaven for**; and therefore, in all your private duties and services, labor after that communion with God in them, that may break the neck and heart of your most bosom-sins. When Darius fled before Alexander, that he might run the faster out of danger, he threw away his massive crown from his head. As ever you would be safe from eternal danger, throw away your golden and your silver idols, throw away your bosom-sins, your darling lusts.

And thus I have done with the answers to that noble and necessary question, that was last proposed.

(9.) My ninth advice and counsel is this, **In all your closet-duties look that your ends be right, look that the glory of God be your ultimate end**, the mark, the bulls-eye, that you have in your eye. There is a great truth in that old saying, that "duties are esteemed, not by their acts—but by their ends." Look! as the shining sun overshadows the light of the fire, so the glory of God must consume all other ends. There may be bad aims in good actions, as in Jehu's zeal. Two things make a good Christian, good actions and good aims. And though a good aim does not make a bad action good, as in Uzzah—yet a bad aim makes a good action bad, as in Jehu, whose justice was approved—but his policy punished. God writes 'worthless' upon all those services, wherein men's ends are not right Jer_32 23, "They obeyed not your voice, neither walked in your law, they have done nothing of all that you have commanded them to do." So Dan_9 13, "All this evil is come upon us—yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God." The Jews were very much in religious duties and services; witness Isa_1 11-15; Isa_58 1-3; Zec_7 5-6. I might produce a hundred more witnesses to confirm it, were it necessary; but because they did not aim at the glory of God in what they did, therefore the Lord writes a cipher upon all their duties and services. It was Ephraim's folly, that he brought forth fruit unto *himself*, Hos_10 1.

It was the Pharisees' hypocrisy, that in all their duties and services they looked at the praise of men. Mat_6 1-5, "Verily," says Christ, "you have your reward." A poor, a pitiful reward indeed! Such men shall be sure to fall short of divine acceptance, and of a glorious recompense; who are not able to look above the praises of men. Woe to that man who, with Augustus, is ambitious to go off the *stage of duty* with a plaudit. Peter was not himself when he denied his Lord, and cursed himself to get credit among a cursed crew. As ever you would ask and have, speak and speed, seek and find—see that the glory of the Lord be engraved upon all your closet-duties. He shall be sure to speed best, whose heart is set most upon glorifying of God in all his secret retirements. When God crowns us, he does but crown his own gifts in us; and when we give God the glory of all we do, we do but give him the glory which is due unto his name; for it is he, and he alone, who works all our works in us and for us.

All closet-duties are good or bad, as the mark is at which the soul aims. He who makes God the object of closet-prayer—but not the end of closet-prayer, does but lose his prayer, and take pains to undo himself. God will be all in all—or he will be nothing at all. **Such prayers never reach the ear of God, nor delight the heart of God, nor shall ever be lodged in the bosom of God—which are not directed to the glory of God.** The end must be as noble as the means, or else a man may be undone after all his doings. A man's most splendid actions will at last be found to be but **splendid sins**, if he has made himself, and not the glory of God, the end of those actions.

(10.) My tenth advice and counsel is this, **Be sure that you offer all your closet prayers in Christ's name, and in his alone**; Joh_14 13-14, "And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." Joh_15 16, "Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." Joh_16 23-24, "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." O sirs! this is your privilege as well as your comfort, that you never deal with God but by a mediator. When you appear before God, Jesus Christ appears with you, and he appears for you; when you invoke—then he advocates; when you put up your petitions—then he does make intercession for you. Christ gives you a commission to put his name upon all your requests; and whatever prayer comes up with this name upon it, he will procure it an answer. In the state of innocency, man might worship God without a mediator; but since sin has made so wide a breach between God and man, God will accept of no worship from man—but what is offered up by the hand of a mediator. Now this mediator is Christ alone; 1Ti_2 5, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." One mediator, not of redemption only, as the papists grant—but of intercession also, which they deny.

The papists make saints and angels co-mediators with Christ; but in this, as in other things, they fight against clear Scripture light. The apostle plainly tells us, that the office of intercession pertains unto Christ, as part of his mediation, Heb_7 25 and it is certain, that we need no other *master of requests* in heaven—but the man Christ Jesus; who being so near to the Father, and so dear to the Father, and so much in with the Father, can doubtless accomplish anything with the Father, which makes for his glory and our good. This was typified in the law. The high-priest alone did enter into the sanctuary, and carry the names of the children of Israel before the Lord, while the people stood all outside; this pointed out Christ's mediation, Exo_28 29. In Lev_16 13-14, you read of two things first, of the cloud of incense that covered the mercy seat; secondly, of the blood of the bullock, which was sprinkled before the mercy-seat. Now that blood typified Christ's satisfaction, and the cloud of incense his intercession.

Some of the learned think, that Christ intercedes only by virtue of his merits; others, that it is done only with his mouth. I suppose it may be done both ways, the rather because Christ has a tongue, as also a whole body—but glorified, in heaven; and is it likely, that that mouth which pleaded so much for us on earth, should be altogether silent for us in heaven?

There is no coming to the Father—but by the Son, Joh_14 6. Christ is the true Jacob's ladder, by which we must ascend to heaven. Joseph, you know, commanded his brethren, that as ever they looked for any good from him, or to see his face with joy, that they should be sure to bring their brother Benjamin along with them. O sirs! as ever you would be prevalent with God, as ever you would have sweet, choice, and comfortable returns from heaven to all your closet-prayers, be sure that you bring your elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the arms of your faith, be sure that you treat and trade with God only in the name of the Lord Jesus.

When you go to closet-prayer, look that you pray not in your own names—but in the name of Christ; and that you believe and hope not in your own names—but in the name of Christ; and that you look not to speed in your own names—but in the name of Christ Col_3 17, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Whatever we do, we are to do it by the *authority* of Christ, and through the *assistance* of Christ, and in the *name* of Christ, and for the *sake* and *glory* of Christ. Christ's name is so precious and powerful with the Father, that it will carry any suit, obtain any request at his hands. When a man writes the name of Jesus upon his closet-prayers, then he shall be sure to speed. Though God will not give a man a drop, a sip, a crumb, a crust, for his own sake—yet for Jesus' sake he will give the best, the choicest, and the greatest blessings that heaven affords; that name is still mighty and powerful, prevalent and precious before the Lord.

The prayers which were offered up with the *incense* upon the altar were pleasing, Rev_8 3; and were accepted by God, Rev_8 4. Joseph's brethren were kindly received for Benjamin's sake. O sirs! all our duties and services are accepted by the Father, not for their own sakes, nor for our sakes—but for Christ's sake! There are no prayers that are either heard, owned, accepted, regarded, or rewarded—but such as Christ puts his hand to. If Christ does not mingle his blood with our sacrifices, our services—they will be lost, and never ascend as incense before the Lord. No coin is accepted, which has not Caesar's stamp upon it; nor any prayers are accepted in heaven, which have not the stamp of Christ upon them. There is nothing more pleasing to our heavenly Father, than to use the mediation of his Son. Such shall be sure to find most favor, and to speed best in the court of heaven—who present themselves before the Father with Christ in their arms. But,

(11.) My eleventh and last advice and counsel is this, **When you come out of your closets, narrowly watch what becomes of your private prayers.** Look at what door, in what way, and by what hand the Lord shall please to give you an answer to the secret desires of your souls. It has been the custom of the people of God, to look after their prayers, to see what success they have had, to observe what answer they have found in heaven Psa_5 3, "My voice shall you hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto you—and will look up." In the words you may observe two things first, David's posture in prayer; secondly, his practice after prayer. First, His posture in prayer, "I will direct my prayer unto you." Secondly, His practice after prayer, "And I will look up." The psalmist, in these words, makes use of two military words. First, he would not only pray—but marshal up his prayers, he would put them in battle-array; so much the Hebrew word imports. Secondly, when he had done this, then he would be as a watchman upon his watchtower, to see whether he prevailed, whether he got the answer or not; and so much the Hebrew word imports. When David had set his prayers, his petitions, in rank and file, in good array, then he was resolved he would look abroad, he would look about him, to see at what door God would send in an answer of prayer.

He is either a fool or a madman, he is either very weak or very wicked, who prays and prays—but never looks after his prayers; who shoots many an arrow towards heaven—but never minds where his arrows alight Psa_85 8, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak; for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints." If David would have God to hearken to his prayers, he must then hearken to what God will speak; and upon this point it seems he was fully resolved. David's prayer you have in Psa_85 1-7, and his gracious resolution you have in Psa_85 8, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." As if he had said, "Certainly it will not be long before the Lord will give me a gracious answer, a seasonable and a suitable return to my present prayers."

Psa_130 1-2; Psa_130 5-6, "Out of the depths have I cried unto you, O Lord Lord, hear my voice, let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning; I say, more than those who watch for the morning." Those who watch abroad in dangerous times and severe weather look frequently for peep of day. How does the weary sentinel, who is wet with the rain of heaven or with the dew of the night—wait and watch, look and long, for the morning light. Now this was the frame and temper of David's spirit when he came off from praying; he falls a-waiting for a gracious answer. Shall the farmer wait for the precious fruits of the earth, and shall the merchantman wait for the return of his ships, and shall the wife wait for the return of her husband, who is gone a long journey? Jas_5 7-8, and shall not a Christian wait for the return of his prayers?

Noah patiently waited for the return of the dove to the ark with an olive-branch in his mouth, so must you patiently wait for the return of your prayers. When *children* shoot their arrows, they never mind where they fall; but when prudent archers shoot their arrows, they stand and watch where they fall. You must deal by your prayers as prudent archers do by their arrows. Hab_2 1, "I will stand at my guard post and station myself on the lookout tower. I will watch to see what He will say to me." The prophet, in the former chapter, having been very earnest in his expostulations, and very fervent in his supplications, he gets now upon his watchtower, to see what becomes of his prayers. He stands as a sentinel, and watches as vigilantly and as carefully as a spy, a scout, earnestly longing to hear and see the event, the outcome, and success of his prayers.

That Christian who in prayer has one eye upon a divine precept, and another upon a gracious promise—that Christian will be sure to look after his prayers. He who prays and waits, and waits and prays, shall be sure to speed; he shall never fail of rich returns, Psa_40 1-4. He who can pray as well as wait, and he who can be contented that God is glorified, though he himself is not gratified; he who dares not demand God's promises immediately, but patiently waits for the accomplishment of them—he may be confident that he shall have seasonable and suitable answers to all those prayers that he has posted away to heaven.

Though God seldom comes at our time—yet he never fails to come at his own time "He who shall come, will come, and will not tarry," Heb_10 37. The mercies of God are not styled the *swift*—but the "*sure* mercies of David." He who makes as much conscience to look after his prayers as to pray, he shall shortly clap his hands for joy, and cry out with that blessed martyr, "He has come, he has come, he has come." Certainly there is little worth in that man's heart, or in that man's prayers, who keeps up a trade of prayer—but never looks what becomes of his prayers. When you are in your closets, marshal your prayers; see that every prayer keeps his place and ground; and when you come out of your closets, then look up for an answer; only take heed that you be not too hasty and hot with God. Though mercy in the promise be yours—yet the *time* of giving it out is the Lord's; and therefore you must *wait* as well as pray.

And thus much by way of **counsel** and **advice**, for the better carrying on of closet prayer.

I have now but one thing more to do before I close up this discourse, and that is, to lay down some **means**, **rules**, or **directions** which may be of use to help you on in a faithful and conscientious discharge of this great duty, namely, closet-prayer.

09 Means, Rules, and Directions

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I have now but one thing more to do before I close up this discourse, and that is, to lay down some **means**, **rules**, or **directions** which may be of use to help you on in a faithful and conscientious discharge of this great duty, namely, closet-prayer. And therefore thus,

(1.) First, As ever you would give up yourselves to private prayer, **Take heed of an idle and slothful spirit.** If Adam, in the state of innocency, must work and dress the garden, and if, after his fall, when he was monarch of all the world, he must yet labor—why should any be idle or slothful? Idleness is a sin against the law of creation. God created man to labor, the idle person violates this law of creation; for by his idleness he casts off the authority of his Creator, who made him for labor. Idleness is a contradiction to the principles of our creation. Man in innocency should have been freed from weariness—but not from employment; he was to dress the garden by divine appointment "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to dress it, and to keep it," Gen_2 15. All weariness in labor, and all vexing, tiring, and tormenting labor, came in by the fall "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread," Gen_3 19. The bread of idleness is neither sweet nor sure "An idle person shall suffer hunger," says Solomon, Pro_19 15. "Warn those who are idle." 1Th_5 14

An idle life and a holy heart are far enough asunder. By doing nothing, says the heathen man, men learn to do evil things. It is easy slipping out of an idle life into an evil and wicked life; yes, an idle life is of itself evil, for man was made to be active, not to be idle. The Cyclops thought man's happiness did consist in doing nothing; but no excellent thing can be the child of idleness. Idleness is a mother-sin, a breeding-sin; it is the devil's cushion, on which he sits, and the devil's anvil, on which he frames very great and very many sins, Eph_4 28; 2Th_3 10; 2Th_3 12. Look! as toads and serpents breed most in standing waters, so sin thrives most in idle people. Idleness is that which provokes the Lord to forsake men's bodies, and the devil to possess their souls.

No man has less means to preserve his body, and more temptations to infect his soul, than an idle person. Oh shake off sloth! The sluggish Christian will be sleeping, or idling, or trifling, when he should be in his closet a-praying. Sloth is a fatal sickness of the soul; get it cured, or it will be your eternal bane. Of all devils, it is the idle devil which keeps men most out of their closets. There is nothing that gives the devil so much advantage against us as idleness. It was good counsel that Jerome gave to his friend, that when the devil comes with a temptation, you may answer him you are not at leisure.

It was the speech of Mr. Greenham, once a famous preacher of this nation, that when the devil tempted a poor soul, she came to him for advice how she might resist the temptation, and he gave her this answer "Never be idle—but be always well employed, for in my own experience I have found it. When the devil came to tempt me, I told him that I was not at leisure to hearken to his temptations, and by this means I resisted all his assaults." Idleness is the time of temptation, and an idle person is the devil's tennis-ball, tossed by him at his pleasure.

"He who labors," said the old hermit, "is tempted but by one devil—but he who is idle is assaulted by all." Cupid complained that he could never fasten upon the Muses, because he could never find them idle. The fowler bends his bow and spreads his net for birds when they are set, not when they are upon the wing. So Satan shoots his most fiery darts at men, when they are most idle and slothful. And this the Sodomites found by woeful experience, Eze_16 49, when God rained hell out of heaven upon them, both for their idleness, and for those other sins of theirs, which their idleness did expose them to.

It was said of Rome, that during the time of their wars with Carthage and other enemies in Africa, they knew not what vice meant; but no sooner had they got the conquest—but through idleness they came to ruin. Idleness is a sin, not only against the law of grace—but also against the light of nature. You cannot look any way but every creature checks and upbraids your idleness and sloth; if you look up to the heavens, there you shall find all their glorious lights constant in their motions, "The sun rejoices as a strong man to run a race," Psa_19 5; Psa_104 23; the winds blow, the waters run, the earth brings forth her pleasant and delightful fruits, all the fish in the sea, fowls in the air, and beasts in the fields and on the mountains, have their motions and operations, all which call aloud upon man not to be idle—but active. Solomon sends the sluggard to the ant to learn industry, Pro_6 6. The ant is a very little creature—but exceeding laborious. Nature has put an instinct into her to be very busy and active all the summer; she is early and late at it, and will not lose an hour unless the weather hinders.

And the prophet Jeremiah sends the Jews to school to learn to wait, and observe of the stork, the turtle-dove, the crane, and the swallow, Jer_8 7. And our Savior sends us to the sparrows and lilies, to learn attendance upon providence, Mat_6 26; Mat_6 28. And let me send you to the busy bee, to learn activity and industry; though the bee is little in bulk—yet it is great in service; she flies far, examines the fields, hedges, trees, orchards, gardens, and loads herself with honey and wax, and then returns to her hive. Now how should the activity of these creatures put the idle person to a blush. O sirs! man is the most noble creature, into whom God has put principles of the greatest activity, as capable of the greatest and highest enjoyments; and therefore idleness is a forgetting man's dignity, and a forsaking of that rank that God has set him in, and a debasing of himself below the least and basest creatures, who constantly in their order obediently serve the law of their creation. Nay, if you look up to the blessed angels above you, you shall still find them active and serviceable; "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Heb_1 14. And if you look down to the demons of darkness below you, oh how laborious and industrious are they to destroy and damn your precious and immortal souls! 1Pe_5 8.

For a close, remember that idleness is so great an evil, that it has been condemned and severely punished by the very worst of men. Among the Egyptians, idleness was a capital crime. Among the Lucans, he who lent money to an idle person was to forfeit it. By Solon's law, idle people were to suffer death; and Seneca had rather be sick than idle. The Lacedemonian called men to an account for their idle hours. Antoninus Pius, being emperor, caused the roofs and coverings of all such houses to be taken away, as were known to receive in idle people, affirming that nothing was more unfitting, or absurd to be allowed, than such idle caterpillars and slowworms to have their food and nourishment from that commonwealth, in the maintenance of which there was no supply from their industry and labor. All which should steel us and arm us against sloth and idleness.

I have the longer insisted on this, because there is not a greater hindrance to closet prayer than sloth and idleness. Slothful and idle people commonly lie so long a-bed, and spend so much precious time between the comb and the glass, and in eating, drinking, sporting, and trifling, etc., that they can find no time for private prayer. Certainly such as had rather go sleeping to hell, than sweating to heaven, will never care much for closet-prayer. And therefore shun sloth and idleness, as you would shun a lion in the way, or poison in your food, or coals in your bosom, or else you will never find time to wait upon God in your closets.

(2.) Secondly, **Take heed of spending too much of your precious time about circumstantials, about the minor things of religion**, as "mint, anise, and cummin," Mat_23 23, or in searching into the circumstances of worship, or in standing stoutly for this or that ceremony, or about inquiring what fruit it was which Adam ate in paradise, or in inquiring after things which God in his infinite wisdom has concealed, or in inquiring what God did before the world was made. When one asked Austin that question, he answered, "that he was preparing hell for such busy questionists as he was." It was a saying of Luther, "From a vain-glorious doctor, from a contentious pastor, and from unprofitable questions, the good Lord deliver his church." It is one of Satan's great designs to hinder men in the great and weighty duties of religion, by busying them most about the lowest and least matters of religion. Satan is never better pleased, than when he sees Christians puzzled and perplexed about those things in religion, which are of no great consequence or importance, Col_2 21. Such as who trade in religion for a good name, more than a good life; for a good report, more than a good conscience; to humor others, more than to honor God, etc., such will take no pleasure in closet-duties. Such as are more busied about ceremonies than substances, about the form of godliness than the power, 2Ti_3 5, such will never make it their business to be much with God in their closets, as is evident in the Scribes and Pharisees, Mat_6 1-6. Such as are more taken up with the outward dress and garb of religion, than they are with the spirit, power, and life of religion. Such will never make a secret trade heavenwards, Luk_11 34-40. **There cannot be a surer nor a greater character of a hypocrite, than to make a great deal of stir about little things in religion, and in the mean while neglect the great and main things in religion.** Such as these have all along in the Scripture discovered a strangeness, and a perfect carelessness as to closet duties. I never knew any man hot and zealous about circumstantials, about the little things of religion, who was ever famous for closet prayer. But,

(3.) Thirdly, **Take heed of curiosity, and of spending too much of your precious time in searching into those dark, abstruse, mysterious, and hidden truths and things of God and religion**, which lie most remote from the understanding of the best and wisest of men. Curiosity is the spiritual adultery of the soul. Curiosity is a spiritual drunkenness; for look, as the drunkard is never satisfied unless he sees the bottom of the cup, be it ever so deep; so those who are troubled with the itch of curiosity, will say they can never be satisfied until they come to the bottom of the most deep and profound things of God. They love to pry into God's secrets, and to scan the mysteries of religion—by their weak, shallow reason—and to be wise above what is written. Curious searchers into the deep mysterious things of God will make all God's depths to be shallows, rather than they will be thought not able to fathom them by the short line of their own reason.

Oh that men would once learn to be **contentedly ignorant**, where God would not have them knowing! Oh that men were once so humble, as to account it no disparagement to them, to acknowledge some depths in God, and in the blessed Scripture, which their shallow reason cannot fathom! They are only a company of fools, who attempt to know more than God would have them. Did not Adam's tree of knowledge make him and his posterity mere fools? He who goes to school to his own reason, has a fool for his schoolmaster!

The ready way to grow stark blind is to be still prying and gazing upon the body of the sun so the ready way to spiritual blindness is to be still prying into the most secret and hidden things of God, Deu_29 29. Are there not many who, by prying long into the secrets of *nature*, are become archenemies to the *grace* of God? Rom_9 20. Oh that we were wise to admire those deep mysteries which we cannot understand, and to adore those depths and counsels which we cannot reach. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" Rom_11 33. "There are secret things which belong to the Lord our God." Deu_29 29. "For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isa_55 9

Oh let us check our curiosity in the things of God, and sit down satisfied and contented to resolve many of God's actions into some hidden causes which lie secret in the abyss of his eternal knowledge and infallible will. Christ, when he was on earth, very frequently, severely, and sharply condemned curious inquirers, as is evident by these scriptures [Joh_21 22; Act_1 6-7] and the great reason why our Savior did so frequently check this humor of curiosity, was because the great indulgers of it were too frequent neglecters of the more great, necessary, and important points of religion.

Curiosity is one of Satan's most dangerous weapons, by which he keeps many souls out of their closets, yes, out of heaven. When many a poor soul begins in good earnest to look towards heaven, and to apply himself to closet duties, then Satan begins to bestir himself, and to labor with all his might, so to busy the poor soul with vain inquiries, and curious speculations, and unprofitable curiosities, that the soul has no time for closet prayer. Ah! how well might it have been with many a man, had he but spent one quarter of that time in closet prayer, that he has spent in curious inquiries after things that have not been fundamental to his happiness.

The heathenish priests affected curiosity, they had their mythologies, and strange canting expressions of their imaginary inaccessible deities, to amaze and amuse their blind superstitious followers, and thereby to hold up their popish and apish idolatries in greater veneration. Oh that there were none of this heathenish spirit among many in these days, who have their faces toward heaven! Ah! how many are there that busy themselves more in searching after the reasons of the irrecoverableness of man's fall, than they do to recover themselves out of their fallen estate! Ah, how many are there that busy themselves more about the apostasy of the angels, than they do about securing their saving interest in Christ! And what a deal of precious time have some spent in discovering the natures, distinctions, properties, and orders of angels.

That high-soaring, imaginative Dionysius describes the hierarchy of angels as exactly as if he had dwelt among them. He says there are nine orders of them, which be grounds upon nine words, which are found partly in the Old Testament, and partly in the New; as seraphims, cherubim, thrones, powers, hosts, dominions, principalities, archangels, and angels; and then he describes their several natures, distinctions, and properties, as that the first three orders are for immediate attendance on the Almighty, and the next three orders for the general government of the creatures, and the last three orders for the particular good of God's elect; that the archangel surpasses the beauty of angels ten times, principalities surpass the archangels twenty times, and that powers surpass the principalities forty times, etc. How he came by this learning is not known, and yet this hierarchy in these nine several orders has passed for current through many ages of the church.

The devil knows he is no loser, and the curious soul but a very little gainer, if he can but persuade him to spend most of his precious time in studying and poring upon the most dark, mysterious, and hidden things of God. He who affects to read the Revelation of John more than his plain epistles; or Daniel's prophecies more than David's Psalms; and is more busy about reconciling difficult scriptures than he is about mortifying of unruly lusts, or who is set more upon vain speculations than upon things that make most for edification—he is not the man who is cut out for closet-prayer. Such as affect sublime notions, obscure expressions, and are men of abstracted conceits, are but a company of wise fools, that will never take any delight to be with God in a corner. Had many men spent but half that time in secret prayer, that they have spent in seeking after the philosopher's stone, how happy might they have been! Oh how holy, how happy, how heavenly, how humble, how wise, how knowing, might many men have been, had they spent but half that time in closet prayer, that they have spent in searching after those things that are hard to be understood! 2Pe_3 16. But,

(4.) Fourthly, **Take heed of engaging yourselves in a crowd of worldly businesses**. Many have so much to do on earth that they have no time to look up to heaven. As much earth puts out the fire, so much worldly business puts out the fire of heavenly affections. Look! as the earth swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Num_22 32; so much worldly business swallows up so much precious time, that many men have no leisure to be with God in their closets. "This business is to be done, and that business cannot be omitted, and the other necessary occasion must be attended—so that I have no leisure to step out of my shop into my closet," says the earthly-minded man, Php_3 19. Thus a crowd of worldly businesses crowds closet-prayer quite out of doors. Many drive so great a trade in their shops, that their private trade to heaven is quite laid by. There is nothing that has kept men more from Christ and closet-prayer, than the shop, the exchange, the farm, and the oxen, etc., Luk_14 16-22.

The stars which have least circuit are nearest the pole; and men that are least perplexed with worldly businesses are commonly nearest to God, to Christ, to heaven, and so the fitter for closet-prayer. It is sad when men grasp so much worldly business, that they can have no leisure for communion with God in private prayer. The noise is such in a mill, as hinders all private fellowship between man and man; and so a multitude of worldly businesses make such a noise, as that it hinders all private fellowship between God and the soul. If a man of much business should now and then slide into his closet—yet his head and his heart will be so filled and distracted with the thoughts of his employments, that God shall have little of him but his bodily presence, or, at most—but bodily exercise, which profits little, 1Ti_4 8. If Christ blamed Martha, Luk_10 40-42, for the multitude of her domestic employments, though they were undertaken for the immediate service and entertainment of himself, because they hindered her in her soul-concernments; oh how will he one day blame all those who, by running themselves into a crowd of worldly businesses, do cut themselves off from all opportunities of pouring out their souls before him in secret! But,

(5.) Fifthly, **Take heed of secret sins.** There is no greater hindrance to secret prayer in all the world than secret sins; and therefore stand upon your watch, and arm yourselves with all your might against them. There is an antipathy between secret sinning and secret praying; partly from guilt, which makes the soul shy of coming under God's secret eye; and partly from those fears, doubts, disputes, and disorders, which secret sins raise in the heart. Light is not more opposite to darkness, Christ to Belial, nor heaven to hell, than secret prayer is to secret sins; and therefore, whatever you do, look that you keep clear of secret sins. To that purpose consider these four things

[1.] First, That **God is privy to our most secret sins**. [Psa_139 1-4; Jer_13 27, and Jer_29 23; Psa_39 1; 1Ki_20 39; Job_10 12] His eye is as much upon secret sins, as it is upon open sins Psa_90 8, "You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance." God has an eye upon our inmost evils, he sees all that is done in the dark Jer_23 24, "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." Pro_15 3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." To say that God does not see the most secret sins of men, is not only derogatory to his omniscience—but also to his mercy; for how can God pardon those sins, which he does not see to be sins?

There is no cloud, nor curtain, nor moment of darkness, that can stand between the eyes of God and the ways of men Pro_5 21, "The ways of men are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his goings." In this scripture Solomon mainly speaks of the ways of the adulterer, which usually are plotted with the most cunning secrecy; yet God sees all those ways. Look! as no boldness can exempt the adulterer from the justice of God, so no secrecy can hide him from the eye of God. Though men labor to hide their ways from others, and from themselves—yet it is but labor in vain to endeavor to hide them from God. Men who labor to hide God from themselves, can never hide themselves from God.

I have read that Paphnutius turned Thais and Ephron, two infamous strumpets, from immorality, only with this argument, "That God sees all things in the dark, when the doors are closed, the windows shut, and the curtains drawn." Heb_4 13, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight but all things are naked and opened (that is, anatomized) even to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." It is an allusion to the priests under the law, who, when they killed an animal for sacrifice, all things that were within the beast were laid open and naked before the priest, that he might see what was sound and what was corrupted. Though evil is done out of the eye of all the world—yet it is naked and manifest in his sight with whom we have to do.

Those sins which lie closest and are most secretly lurking in the heart, are as obvious and odious to God as those which are most fairly written upon a man's forehead. God is **all eye**; so that He sees all--even the most secret turnings and windings of our hearts. Our most secret sins are as plainly seen by him, as anything can be seen by us at noonday Psa_139 11-12, "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." It is not the thickest clouds which can bar out his observance, whose eyes fill heaven and earth. What is the curtain, or the darkest night, or the double lock, or the secret chamber—to him who clearly observes all things in a perfect nakedness. God has an eye upon the most inward intentions of the heart, and the most subtle motions of the soul.

Those philosophers were wrong, who held the eye and ear of God descended no lower than the heavens. Certainly there is not a creature, not a thought, not a thing—but lies open to the all-seeing eye of God. The Lord knows our all secret sinnings as exactly as our visible sinnings Psa_44 21, "He knows the secrets of our hearts." Would not a malefactor speak truly at the trial, did he know, did he believe that the judge had windows which looked into his heart?

Athenodorus, a heathen, could say, that all men ought to be careful in the actions of their life, because God was everywhere, and beheld all that was done.

Zeno, a wise heathen, affirmed that God beheld even the thoughts.

It was an excellent saying of Ambrose, "If you cannot hide yourself from the sun, which is God's minister of light, how impossible will it be to hide yourself from him, whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun." Though a sinner may baffle his conscience—yet he cannot baffle the eye of God's omniscience! Oh! that poor souls would remember, that as they are never out of the reach of God's hand, so they are never from under the view of his eye. God is 'totus oculus', all eye. Jer_16 17, "My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes." Job_34 21-22, "His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide." Jer_32 19, "Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve."

You know what Ahasuerus, that great monarch, said concerning Haman, when coming in he found him cast upon the queen's couch, on which she sat, "What," says he, "Will he even molest the queen while she is *with me in the house?"* Est_7 8. "What, will he dare to commit such villany, and *I stand and look on?"* O sirs! to sin in the sight of God, to do wickedly under the eye of God, is a thing that he looks upon as the greatest affront, and as the highest indignity that can possibly be done unto him. What, says God, will you be drunk before me? Will you swear and blaspheme before me? Will you be wanton and unclean before me? Will you be unjust and unrighteous under my eye? Will you pollute my ordinances before my face? Will you despise and persecute my servants in my presence? etc. This, then, is the killing aggravation of all sin—that it is done before the face of God, that it is committed in the royal presence of the King of kings!

The very consideration of God's omnipresence should bravely arm us against sin and Satan; the consideration of his all-seeing eye should make us shun all occasions of sin, and make us shy of all appearances of sin. Shall the eye of the teacher keep the scholar from blotting his copy? Shall the eye of the judge keep the malefactor from thieving and stealing? Shall the eye of the master keep the servant from idling and trifling? Shall the eye of the father keep the child from wandering and gadding? Shall the eye of the husband keep the wife from extravagancies and indecencies? Shall the sharp eye of a near neighbor, or the quick eye of a bosom-friend—keep you from many enormities and vanities? And shall not the strict, the pure, the jealous eye of an all-seeing God, keep you from sinning in the secret chamber, when all curtains are drawn, doors bolted, and everyone in the house sleeping--but you and your Delilah? Oh! what dreadful atheism is bound up in that man's heart, who is more afraid of the eye of his father, his pastor, his child, his servant, than he is of the eye and presence of the eternal God! Oh! that all whom this concerns, would take such serious notice of it, as to judge themselves severely for it, as to mourn bitterly over it, as to strive mightily in prayer with God both for the pardon of it, and for power against it.

The apostle sadly complains of some in his time who wallowed in secret sins. Eph_5 12, "For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret." He speaks of such as had lived in secret fornications and uncleanness. There were many that had put on a form of godliness, who yet did allow themselves in the secret actings of abominable wickedness and filthiness, as if there were no God to behold them, nor conscience to accuse them, nor judgment-day to arraign them, nor justice to condemn them, nor hell to torment them! Oh! how infinitely odious must they be in the eyes of a holy God, who can highly court and compliment him in public, and yet are so bold as to provoke him to his face in private. These are like those whores, who pretend a great deal of affection and respect to their husbands abroad, and yet at home will play the harlots before their husbands' eyes.

Such as perform religious duties only to cloak and color over their secret filthinesses, their secret wickednesses; such as pretend to pay their vows, and yet wait for the twilight, Pro_7 13-15; Job_24 15; such as commit wickedness in a corner, and yet with the harlot wipe their mouths, and say, 'What wrong have we done?' such shall at last find the chambers, the stones out of the wall, the beam out of the timber, the seats they sit on, and the beds they lie on—to witness against all their wanton dalliances, and lascivious behavior in secret, Hab_2 11. Heb_13 4, "God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." He will sentence them himself; and why? but because such sinners behave so secretly and craftily, that oftentimes none but God can find them out! Magistrates often neglect the punishing of such sinners, when their secret wickedness is made known; and therefore God himself will sit in judgment upon them. Though they may escape the eyes of men—yet they shall never escape the judgment of God!

Heart iniquities fall not under any human sentence. Usually the sexually immoral are very conniving, and secret and subtle to conceal their abominable filthiness; therefore the harlot is said to be 'subtle of heart,' Pro_7 10. The Hebrew is translated by one as "*having her heart fenced.* For as a city is environed with fortifications, so her heart is fortified round about with subtlety." Or else it may be rendered "fast shut up in the heart, even as close as a besieged city," that is, "most secret in the subtlety of her heart, how open soever she be in the boldness of her outward behavior." So the prophet Agur reckons the way of a man with a maid, and the way of an adulterous woman, among those things which neither himself nor any other man was possibly able to discover and find out; and compares it to the way of three things, which no wit nor industry of man is able to descry. But yet God sees all, and will bring all to the judgement, Pro_30 19-20. But,

[2.] Secondly, Consider that **secret sins shall be revealed**. [In my treatise called "Apples of Gold," I have proved by many arguments that the sins of the saints shall not be brought into the judgment of the great day; and therefore understand this second particular of such people who live and die in their secret sins without repentance and faith in the blood of Christ.]

The most hidden works of darkness shall be openly manifested; for though the actings of sin are in the dark—yet the judgings of sin shall be in the light; Luk_8 17, "For nothing is concealed that won’t be revealed, and nothing hidden that won’t be made known and come to light." Ecc_12 14, "God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Mark, he does not say *some* work—but *every* work; and not only works—but *secrets*; and not only secrets—but *every* secret; and not only secret good things but *evil* things also. Whether good works or wicked works, whether secret or open—all must be brought to judgment. The books of God's omniscience, and man's conscience, shall then be opened; and then secret sins shall be as legible as if they were written on your forehead; as if they were written with the most glittering sunbeams upon a wall of crystal.

All men's secret sins are printed in heaven, and God will at last read them aloud in the ears of all the world 1Co_4 5, "Therefore don’t judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts." Look! as there are a world of particles in the air, which we never see until the sun shines; so there are many thousand thousands of proud thoughts, and unclean thoughts, and worldly thoughts, and malicious thoughts, and envious thoughts, and bloody thoughts, etc., which the world neither sees nor knows! But in the great day, when the intentions of all hearts shall be manifest, then all shall come out; then all shall appear, to the open gaze of all the world. In that great day—all masks, cloaks, and hoods shall be pulled off—and then all shall made visible! All that ever you have done in the secret chamber, in the dark corner—shall be made known to men and angels, yes, to the whole court of heaven, and to all the world besides! Rom_2 16, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." In this great day, God will judge not only our words but our works, not only our open works—but also our secret works and ways.

When Jehoiakim was dead, there was found the superstitious marks, and prints of his sorcery upon his body, 2Ch_36 8; which shows how deeply idolatry was rooted in his heart, seeing he bore the marks in his flesh during his life. He being a king, kept all hidden; but when he was dead, then all came out, then the marks of his abominable idolatry appeared upon his body. Though sinners, though the greatest of sinners, may hide and keep hidden their horrid abominations for a time—yet there will come a time when all shall be manifested; when all their secret marks and secret abominations shall be obvious to all the world.

But sinners may be ready to object and say, "Let us but alone in our secret sins until that day, and then we shall do well enough." And therefore in the,

[3.] Third place, consider, **That God many times does, even in this life, discover and make known to the world men's secret sins**. God loves to act suitable to his own names. Now, to be a *revealer of secrets*, is one of his names, Dan_2 47; and accordingly, even in this world, he often brings to light the most hidden things of darkness. Of all the glorious attributes of God, there is none which suffers so deeply by secret sins, as the attribute of his omniscience; and therefore in this world God often stands up to vindicate the honor of that attribute, by unmasking of sinners, and by bringing to the light all those secret paths and ways of wickedness, wherein they have long walked undiscovered.

It was for the honor of this blessed attribute of God, that the secret-plotted sin of **Ananias** and **Sapphira**, Act_5 1-42, was so openly discovered; "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." Joseph's brethren for a long time hid their malice, their craft, their cruelty, their envy, their treachery, in selling their brother into Egypt; but at last by amazing providences, all was brought to light, Gen_42 21-22; Gen_50 15-22. Conscience, which for a time may seem to be asleep—yet will in time awake, and make the sinner know, that he is as faithful in recording, as he is fearful in accusing; and this Joseph's brethren found by sad experience.

Likewise with **Gehazi**, he sins secretly, he lies fearfully; but at last all comes out, and instead of being clothed richly, he and his posterity were clothed with a leprosy forever; and instead of two changes of garments, God hangs them up in chains, as a monument of his wrath to all generations, 2Ki_5 20, seq.

So **Achan** secretly and sacrilegiously steals a beautiful garment imported from Babylon, two hundred silver coins, and a bar of gold weighing more than a pound; and hides them in the earth in the midst of his tent, and by reason of this, Israel is defeated before their enemies. But at last Achan is found out, and all comes out, and his golden wedge proved a wedge to cleave him, and his Babylonish garment a garment to shroud him. Joshua makes a bonfire of all that he had secretly and sinfully stolen, and burns him, and his children, and all that he had, in it. Oh how openly, how severely does God sometimes punish men for their most secret iniquity!

The same you may see in that great instance of **David**; 2Sa_12 9-12, "Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword (this was done in a secret letter) and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' This is what the Lord says 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" 2Sa_16 22. David was very studious and very industrious to hide his sin, and to save his reputation; but the covering made of Uriah's blood was too short, and too narrow to hide his sin with Bathsheba, and therefore when he had done all he could, his sin was tossed like a ball, from man to man, through court, city, and country.

I have read of Parthenius, who, having traitorously slain Ausonius and his wife—when no man suspected or accused him thereof, he detected and accused himself after this strange manner as he slept in his bed, suddenly he roared out most pitifully; and being asked what ailed him; he, half asleep, answered, "That Ausonius and his wife, whom he had slain long ago, summoned him to judgment before God." Upon which confession he was apprehended; and, after due examination, stoned to death. Thus the terrors and horrors of his own conscience unveiled that secret wickedness, which none could prove against him.

I have read how that Mahomet the great Turk, had with great rewards, procured two Turks to undertake to kill Scanderbeg. These traitors came to Scanderbeg, making such a show of the detestation both of Mahomet's tyrannical government and vain superstition, that they were both by Scanderbeg and others reputed to be indeed the men they desired to be accounted. Soon after, by a providence, it so happened that these two traitors argued between themselves, by which means the plot came to be discovered; and after due examination and confession of the fact, they were presently condemned and executed.

Conscience is God's spy in the heart. 'Conscience,' says Philo, 'is the little tribunal of the soul. Conscience is a thousand witnesses, for or against a man. Conscience is a court of record, and whatever it sees it writes down; and conscience is always as quick in writing as the sinner can be in sinning.' The very heathen could say that conscience was a god to every man. Conscience, as a scribe, a register—sits in the closet of your hearts, with pen in hand, and makes a journal of all your secret ways and secret crimes, which are above the cognizance of others. Conscience sets down the time when, the place where, the manner how, and the people with whom—such and such secret wickednesses have been committed; and that so clear and evident, that, go where you will, and do what you can, the characters of them shall never be cancelled or erased out, until God appears in judgment. Let a man sin in the most hidden seclusion which human policy can contrive, let him take all the ways he can to hide his sins, to cloak and cover his sin, as Adam did—yet conscience will so play the judge, that it will bring in the evidence, produce the law, urge the penalty, and pass the sentence of condemnation upon him.

There is many a man who makes a fair profession, and who has a great name in the world—who yet is self-condemned, for those secret sins which are not obvious to the eyes of man, nor punishable by the hands of men. Yes, many times in this life, God raises such a hell of horror and terror in many men's consciences, by reason of their secret sins—that they can have no rest nor quiet, neither at bed nor at board, neither lying down nor rising up. Gladly would they conceal their sins, unwilling they are that the world should know how vile they have been in secret; but conscience being upon the rack, and still a-gnawing, accusing, and condemning of them, they can hold no longer. Now all must come out; and now those sins that were most secret and concealed—come to be published upon the housetop.

Some who have been under anguish of conscience, others who have been smitten with a frenzy, and many in their very sleep—have been often the blazers and proclaimers of their own secret filthiness and wickedness. In those cases God has made many a secret sinner cry out with the leper, "Unclean, unclean!" Lev_13 45; and with Judas, before all present, "I have sinned, I have sinned!" Mat_27 4. Many times in this life, God very astonishingly discovers those secret works of darkness, in which people have lived long undiscovered.

A Pythagorean bought a pair of shoes upon trust; the shoemaker dies, he is glad, thinks them gained; but a while after his conscience flies upon him, and becomes a continual chider and tormentor of him. He hereupon visits to the house of the dead, casts in his money with these words, "There, take your due; you live to me, though dead to all besides." But,

[4.] Fourthly, **Consider that secret sins are in some respects more dangerous than open sins.** Many a man bleeds to death inwardly—while no one perceives it. The more inward and secret the disease is, the more the man is in danger to lose his life. There are no fevers so dangerous as those who prey upon the vitals and inward parts; so there are no sins so dangerous and pernicious to the souls of men as those who are most inward and secret. Secret sins often reign in the souls of men most powerfully, when they are least apparent.

First, Consider that **he who sins secretly, deprives himself of those helps and remedies which, by a divine blessing, might arm him against sin, yes, make him victorious over sin**; namely, the prayers, counsels, reproofs, examples, and encouragements of friends, relations, etc. A man's house may be on fire—but while it is all inside—no help comes. But when the fire flames out, when it caches the outside of the house, then help runs in, then help on all hands is ready. *He who sins in secret debars himself of all public remedy, and takes great pains to damn his soul in secret, and to go to hell in the dark.* But,

Secondly, **Secret sins will make way for public sins.** He who makes no conscience of sinning in the secret chamber, will before long, with Absalom, be ready to spread a tent upon the top of the house, and to go in to his concubines in the sight of all Israel, 2Sa_12 11. Such as have made no conscience of stealing a few pins or pennies in private, have in time come to be so bold as to steal a purse in broad daylight. **The cockatrice must be crushed in the egg, else it will soon become a serpent.** The very **thought** of sin, if but continually **meditated** on, will break forth into **action**, action into **custom**, custom into **habit**, and then both body and soul are irrecoverably lost to all **eternity**!

If Satan can but wound our heel, as the poets feign of Achilles, he will send death from the heel to the heart. If the subtle Serpent can but wriggle in his tail by a sinful thought, he will soon get in his head by a worse action. Hence it is that Christ calls hatred, murder; and a wanton eye, immorality. Secret hatred, does often issue in open murder; and secret wanton glances of the eye, do often issue in open immorality. If Amnon is sick with the sinful imaginations of incestuous lust, how will his soul be in pain and travail until he has brought forth! And how many are there that in secret have taken now and then but one cup of liquor, who now may be seen at high noon reeling against every post. Look! as secret diseases in the body, if not cured, will in time openly break forth; so secret sins in the soul, if not pardoned and purged, will in time be openly revealed. Covetousness was Judas' secret sin; and no sooner does an occasion or a temptation present itself—but he is very ready and forward to betray and sell his Lord and Master for thirty pieces of silver before all the world! "Lust having conceived, brings forth sin," Jas_1 15. First, sin has its *conception*—which is its delight; and then sin has its *birth*—which is its action; and then sin has its *growth*—which is its custom; and then sin has its *end*—which is its damnation!

Thirdly, **Secret sinning puts far more respect and fear upon men, than upon God.** You will be unjust in secret, and wanton in secret, and unclean in secret, and treacherous in secret, etc., and why? Because you are afraid that such or such *men* should know it, or that such and such *friends* should know it, or that such and such *relations* should know it? Ah! poor wretch, are you afraid of the eye of a man, of a man who shall die, like the grass? Isa_51 12, and yet not tremble under God's eye, "whose eyes are as a blazing fire?" Rev_1 14. Ah! how full of atheism is that man's heart, which tacitly says, "If my sins be but hid from the eyes of the world, I do not care though the Lord knows them; though the Lord strictly observes them; though the Lord notes them all down." What is this, O man—but to brave it out with God, and to tempt him, and provoke him to his very face! Ah! sinner, sinner—can *man* damn you? can *man* disinherit you? can *man* fill your conscience with horrors and terrors? can *man* make your life a very hell? can *man* bar the gates of glory against you? can *man* speak you into the grave by a word of his mouth? What is worse—can *man* cast you into endless, easeless, and remediless torments? Oh no—he cannot! Can *God* do all this? Oh yes—God can! Why, then, does not your heart stand more in awe of the eye of the great God, than it does of the eye of a poor, weak, mortal man?

I have insisted the longer on this particular, because there is not any one thing in all the world that does more hinder secret communion with God and secret prayer—than secret sins. And oh that you would all make it your great business to **watch** against secret sins, and to **pray** against secret sins, and to **mourn** over secret sins, and deeply to **judge** and **condemn** yourselves for secret sins, and carefully and conscientiously to **shun** and **avoid** all occasions and provocations that may be as fuel to secret sins!

Certainly there are no men or women that are so sincere and serious in closet-prayer; or that are so frequent, so fervent, so constant in closet-prayer; or that are so delighted, so resolute, so undaunted, or so unwearied in closet-prayer; as those who keep themselves most clear and free from secret sins.

For a close, remember this—that though secret sins are in some respects more dangerous than other sins are—yet in three respects they are not so bad nor so dangerous as other sins are.

First, In that they do not so scandalize religion as open sins do.

Secondly, In that they do not shame, grieve, and wound the hearts of the saints as open sins do.

Thirdly, In that they are not so infectious to others, nor such provocations to others to sin against the Lord as open sins are.

And thus you may see what those things are that you must carefully take heed of, as ever you would addict yourselves to closet-prayer.

And as you must take heed of these five things, so there are several other **things that you must carefully and conscientiously apply yourselves to, as ever you would be found faithful and constant in this great duty, namely, closet-prayer**. Now they are these

[1.] First, **Lament greatly and mourn bitterly over the neglect of this choice duty.** He who does not make conscience of mourning over the neglect of this duty, will never make conscience of performing this duty. Oh that your heads were waters, and your eyes a fountain of tears—that you might weep day and night for the great neglect of closet-prayer, Jer_9 1. He who mourns most for the neglect of this duty, will be found most in the practice of this duty. He who makes most conscience to accuse, arraign, and condemn himself for neglecting closet-prayer; he will make most conscience of giving himself up to closet-prayer. It is said of Adam, that he turned his face towards the garden of Eden, and from his heart bitterly lamented his great fall. Oh that you would turn your faces towards your closets, and bitterly lament your rarely going into them. But,

[2.] Secondly, **Habituate yourselves, accustom yourselves, to closet-prayer.** Make private prayer your constant trade. Frequency begets familiarity, and familiarity confidence. We can go freely and boldly into that friend's house whom we often visit. What we are habituated to, we do with ease and delight. A man who is habituated or accustomed to write; to read; to ride; to run; or to play on this or that musical instrument, etc., he does it all with delight and ease. And so a man who does habituate himself to closet-prayer, he will manage it with delight and ease. But,

[3.] Thirdly, **Keep a diary of all your closet-experiences**, Deu_7 18-19; Psa_66 12. Oh, carefully record and book down all your closet mercies! Oh, be often in reading over your closet experiences, and be often in meditating and in pondering upon your closet experiences! There is no way like this, to inflame your love to closet-prayer, and to engage your hearts in this secret trade of private prayer.

Oh remember that at such a time you went into your closets with hard hearts, and dry eyes; but before you came out of your closets, ah, how sweetly, how graciously, how powerfully were you melted, and humbled before the Lord! Psa_6 6; Psa_39 12; Psa_56 8. Oh remember how that at another time you went into your closets clouded and benighted—but came out of your closets with as glorious a shine of God upon your souls, as Moses had upon his face, when he came down from the mount from communing with God! Exo_34 28-29. Oh remember how often you have gone into your closets with cold, frozen spirits—but before you came out of your closets, what a fire has God kindled in your souls, what a spirit of burning have you found in your hearts! Luk_24 31-32; Isa_4 4. Oh remember how often you have gone into your closets straitened and shut up—but before you have come out, how have your souls been aflame! Oh remember what power God has given you against corruptions in your closets, and what strength God has given you against temptations in your closets! Oh remember the sweet discoveries of divine love that you have had when in your closets! Oh remember the secret visits, the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret whispers, the secret love-tokens, that Christ has given you in your closets! Oh seriously ponder upon these things, and then closet duties will be sweet unto you!

It was a sweet saying of Bernard, "O saint, know you not that your husband Christ is bashful, and will not be familiar in company; retire yourself by meditation into your closet, or into the fields, and there you shall have Christ's embraces," Son_8 11-12. Oh the more any man meditates upon his closet-experiences, the more he shall find his heart engaged to closet duties; the more you ponder upon closet experiences, the sweeter will closet-experiences be to your souls; and the sweeter closet-experiences are to your souls, the more your souls will delight to be with God in your closets.

Pliny tells us of one Messala Corvinus, whose memory was so bad, that he forgot his own name. And I am afraid that many of your memories are so bad, that you forget your closet-mercies, your closet-experiences.

I have read of such a pestilential disease once at Athens, as took away the memories of those who were infected with it, so that they forgot their own names. Oh that I had not cause to fear that some pestilential disease or other, has so taken away the memories of many, that they have quite forgot their closet-experiences. Well, friends, remember this, though stony hearts are bad—yet iron memories are good; and oh that you would all labor after iron memories, that so you may remember and ponder upon your closet-experiences.

I have read of the ancients, how they made use of white and black stones, for these two ends **first**, they gave them to people at their arraignment before the judges; if they were condemned to death, they gave him a black stone—but if absolved and set free, a white stone. To which custom the Holy Spirit seems to allude in that Rev_2 17, "To him who overcomes will I give a white stone." A second use of those stones was this, that by them they might keep an account of all the good days or evil days they had met withal in their lives. Hence Giacopo Senzaro having been long in love, and much thwarted about his match, he filled a pot full of black stones, putting only one white stone among them, and being asked the reason, answered, "There will come one white day," meaning his marriage day, "which will make amends for all my black days."

Ah, friends! how often has God given you the white stone in your closets! Certainly you have had more white stones than black stones your closet mercies and experiences have been more than your public crosses and miseries. O sirs! did you but reckon your good days according to the white stones you have had in your closets, it would make you more in love with closet-prayer than ever. But,

[4.] Fourthly, **Be sure that you do not spend so much of your precious time in public duties and ordinances, as that you can spare none for private duties, for secret services.** Though Pharaoh's cows ate up one another—yet our duties must not eat up one another, Gen_41 4. **Public** duties must not eat up family duties, nor **family** duties must not eat up public duties, nor neither of them must not eat up **closet** duties. The wisdom of a Christian does most eminently sparkle and shine, in giving every duty its proper time and place. He cannot be an excellent Christian, who is all eye to read, or all ear to hear, or all tongue to speak, or all knee to bow, to kneel, to pray, Ecc_8 5. Ah! how many are there that spend so much time in hearing of this man and that, and in running up and down from meeting to meeting, that they have no time to meet with God in their closets. O sirs! your duties are never so amiable and lovely, they are never so sweet and beautiful, as when they are seasonably and orderly performed.

Oh how wise are the men of this world, so to order all their civil affairs, that no one business shall interfere with another. They set apart for each business a convenient proportion of time; they allot an hour for one business, two for another, three for another, etc. Oh that we were as wise for our souls, as wise for eternity, as they are for this world. Oh that our hearts would so consult with our heads, that we may never lack a convenient time to seek God in private prayer!

That devil that loves to set one man against another, and one nation against another, and one Christian against another; that devil loves to set one duty against another. Hence it is that on the one hand he works some to cry up public prayers, in opposition to secret prayer; and on the other hand he works others to cry up private duties in opposition to all public duties; whereas all Christians stand obliged by God, so to manage one sort of duties, as not to shut out another sort of duties. Every Christian must find time and room for every duty incumbent upon him. But,

[5.] Fifthly, **Love Christ with a more inflamed love.** Oh strengthen your love to Christ, and your love to closet-duties. Lovers love much to be alone, to be in a corner together, Son_7 10-12. Certainly the more any man loves the Lord Jesus, the more he will delight to be with Christ in a corner. There was a great deal of love between Jonathan and David—and according to their love, so was their private converse, their secret communion one with another; they were always best when in the field together, or when in a corner together, or when behind the door together, or when locked up together. And just so would it be with you, did you but love the Lord Jesus Christ with a more raised and a more inflamed love; you would be always best when you were most with Christ in secret.

Divine love is like a rod of myrtle, which, as Pliny reports, makes the traveler that carries it in his hand so lively and cheerful, that he never faints or grows weary. Ah! friends, did you but love the Lord Jesus with a more strong, with a more raised love, you would never faint in closet-duties, nor you would never grow weary of closet-duties. Look! as the Israelites removed their tents from Mithcah to Hashmonah, from sweetness to swiftness—as the words import, Num_33 29—so the sweetness of divine love will make a man move swiftly on in a way of closet-duties. Divine love will make all closet-duties more easy to the soul, and more pleasant and delightful to the soul; and therefore do all you can to strengthen your love to Christ, and your love to closet-work.

It was observed among the primitive Christians, that they were so full of love one to another, that they could be acquainted one with another as well in half an hour, as in half a year. O sirs! if your hearts were but more full of love to Christ, and closet-duties, you would quickly be better acquainted with them, you would quickly know what secret communion with Christ behind the door means. But,

[6.] Sixthly, **Be highly, thoroughly, and fixedly resolved, in the strength of Christ, to keep close to closet-duties, in the face of all difficulties and discouragements which you may meet with,** Psa_44 17-20. A man of no resolution, or of weak resolution, will be won with a nut, and lost with an apple. Satan, and the world, and carnal relations, and your own hearts, will cast in many things to discourage you, and take you off from closet prayer; but be nobly and firmly resolved to keep close to your closets, let the world, the flesh, and the devil, do and say what they can.

Daniel was a man of an invincible resolution; he would rather be cast into the den of lions—than he would omit praying in his chamber. Of all the duties of religion, Satan is the most deadly enemy to this duty of secret prayer; partly because secret prayer spoils him in his most secret designs, plots, and contrivances against the soul; and partly because secret prayer is so musical and delightful to God; and partly because secret prayer is of such rare use and advantage to the soul; and partly because it keeps the soul far from pride, vain glory, and worldly applause. Therefore he had rather that a man should pray a thousand times in public in the church, or in the corner of the streets—than that he should pray once in his closet. Therefore you had need to steel your hearts with holy courage and resolution, that whatever suggestions, temptations, oppositions, or objections you may encounter with, that yet you will keep close to closet prayer.

There is not any better bulwark in the day of battle, than a heroic resolution of heart before the day of battle. Sanctified resolutions do exceedingly weaken and discourage Satan in his assaults, they do greatly daunt and dishearten him in all his undertakings against the soul. That man will never long be quiet in his closet, who is not steadfastly resolved to seek the Lord in secret, though all the powers of darkness should make head against him. O sirs! divine fortitude, holy resolutions, will make you like a wall of brass, which no arrows can pierce; they will make you fully armored, so no shot can hurt; they will either enable you to remove the greatest mountains of oppositions which lie between you and closet-prayer, or else they will enable you to step over them.

Luther was a man of great resolution, and a man who spent much time in closet-prayer. And such another was Nehemiah, who met with so much opposition, that had he not been steeled by a strong and obstinate resolution, he could never have rebuilt the temple—but would have sunk in the midst of his works. Now, he was a man for private prayer, as I have shown in the beginning of this treatise. Who more resolute than David? and who more for secret prayer than David? The same I might say of Paul, Basil, and many others, who have been famous in their generations.

O sirs! sanctified resolutions for closet prayer, will chain you faster to secret prayer, than ever the resolutions Ulysses did chain him to the mast of the ship. It was a noble resolution that kept Ruth close to her mother-in-law, when her sister Orpah only compliments her, kisses her, and takes her leave of her, Rth_1 10-20. Be but nobly resolved for closet-prayer, and then you will keep close to it, when others only court it, and take their leave of it.

In the Salentine country, there is mention made of a lake, that is still brimful if you put in never so much, it never runs over; if you draw out never so much, it is still full. The resolution of every Christian for closet-prayer, should be like this lake—still brimful. Come life or death, come honor or reproach, come loss or gain, come liberty or bonds, come what can come—the true-bred Christian must be fully and constantly resolved to keep close to his closet. But,

[7.] Seventhly, **Labor for a greater effusion of the Holy Spirit**; for the greater measure any man has of the Spirit of God, the more that man will delight to be with God in secret Zec_12 10, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication."

Joe_2 28-29; Isa_44 3; mark, in the last of the last days, when men shall be generally under a greater effusion of the Holy Spirit than ever, then they shall be more given up to secret prayer than ever. There will never be such praying in secret, and such mourning in secret, as there will be when the Lord shall pour out most richly, gloriously, abundantly, of his Spirit upon his poor people. Now, every one shall pour out his tears and his soul before God in secret, to show the soundness of their sorrow, and to show their sincerity by their secrecy.

Certainly, the more any man is now under the blessed pouring out of the Spirit of Christ, the more that man gives himself up to secret communion with Christ. Every man is more or less with Christ in his closet, as he is more or less under the anointings of the Spirit of Christ. The more any man has of the Spirit of Christ, the more he loves Christ, and the more any man loves Christ, the more he delights to be with Christ alone. Lovers love to be alone. The more any man has of the Spirit of Christ, the more his heart will be set to please Christ.

Now, nothing pleases Christ more than the secret prayers of his people Son_2 14, "O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is lovely." And therefore such a one will be much in secret prayer. The more any man has of the Spirit of Christ, the more his heart will be set upon glorifying and exalting Christ. Now, nothing glorifies Christ more, nor exalts him more, than secret prayer; and therefore the more any man has of the Spirit of Christ, the more that man will be found in secret prayer.

There are many people who say, they would be more in their closets than they are—but that they meet with many hindrances, many occasions, many diversions, many temptations, many oppositions, many difficulties, many discouragements, which prevent them. Ah, friends! had you a greater measure of the Holy Spirit upon you, none of these things would ever be able to hinder your secret trade heavenward. Had you a more rich anointing of the Spirit upon you, you would never plead, 'there is a lion in the way, a lion in the streets!' Pro_26 13. But were there a thousand lions between you and your closets, you would either step over them, or make your way through them—so that you might enjoy communion with Christ in your closets. But,

09 Means, Rules, and Directions contd

[8.] Eighthly and lastly, As ever you would keep close to private prayer, **Be frequent in the serious consideration of eternity.** Oh see eternity standing at the end of every closet-prayer, and this will make you pray to purpose in your closets.

O sirs! every work you do, is a step to a blessed, or to a cursed, eternity. Every motion, every action in this life, is a step toward eternity. As every step that a traveler takes brings him forward to his journey's end, so every step that a man takes in the secret ways of righteousness and holiness, such as closet duties are, they bring him nearer to his journey's end, they bring him nearer to a blessed eternity. Look! as every step the sinner takes in a way of wickedness, brings him nearer to hell; so every step which a saint takes in a way of holiness, brings him nearer to heaven. Look! as every step that a wicked man takes in the ways of unrighteousness brings him nearer to a cursed eternity, so every step that a godly man takes in a way of righteousness, brings him nearer to a blessed eternity.

Zeuxis, the famous painter, was so exceeding careful and cautious in drawing all his lines, that he would let no piece of his go abroad into the world, until he had turned it over and over, and viewed it on this side and that side, again and again, to see if he could spy any fault in it; and being asked the reason why he was so curious; and so long in drawing his lines, answered, 'I paint for eternity.' O sirs! we all pray for eternity, we fast for eternity, we read for eternity, we hear for eternity, we wait for eternity, we weep for eternity; and therefore oh, how exactly, how wisely, how faithfully, how carefully, how diligently, how unweariedly, should we be in all our closet duties and services; seeing that all we do is in order to eternity! **Friends! you must all before long be eternally blessed, or eternally cursed; eternally happy, or eternally miserable; eternally saved, or eternally damned**; eternally accepted, or eternally rejected. And therefore what infinite cause have you frequently to shut to your closet-doors, and to plead mightily with God in a corner, for the lives of your poor, precious, and immortal souls, that they may be eternally saved in the great day of our Lord Jesus. O sirs! when any hindrances to closet-prayer present themselves to you, seriously remember eternity—and that will remove them.

It is related of one Pachomius, that whensoever he felt any unlawful desires to arise in his mind, he was accustomed to drive them away with the remembrance of eternity.

One relates a story of an ungodly fellow, who on a certain night could not sleep, who, upon the serious consideration of death and eternity, and the damned lying in hell, could not be at rest—but eternity did still run in his mind; gladly would he have shaken off the thoughts thereof, as gnawing worms. Therefore he followed sports, and hobbies, and merry-meetings, and sought out companions like himself, and sat oftentimes so long at his drunken cups, that he laid his conscience asleep, and so seemed to take some rest; but when he was awakened, his conscience flew in his face, and would still be a-suggesting sad thoughts of eternity to him. Of all things in the world he could not bear it, to be kept awake in the night; but so it happened that being sick, he was kept awake one night, and could not sleep at all, whereupon these thoughts rise in him "What! is it so tedious then to be kept from sleep one night, and to lie a few hours in the dark? Oh what is it then to be kept in torments and everlasting darkness! I am here in my own house upon a soft bed in the dark, kept from sleep but one night; but to lie in flames and endless misery, how dreadful must that be!" These and such like meditations were the happy means of this young man's conversion.

I have read a notable story of one Theodorus, a Christian young man in Egypt, who, when there was a great deal of feasting, mirth, and music in his father's house, withdrew himself from all the company, and being got alone, he thus thought with himself, "Here is contentment and delight enough for the flesh, I may have what I desire—but how long will this last? This will not hold out long." Then falling down upon his knees before the Lord in secret, he said, "O Lord, my heart is open unto you, I indeed know not what to ask—but only this Lord, let me not die eternally; O Lord, you know I love you, O let me live eternally to praise you."

If there be any way or means on earth to bring us upon our knees before God in secret, it is the serious and solemn thoughts of eternity. Oh that the fear of eternity might fall upon all your souls! Oh that you would all seriously consider, that after a short time is expired, you must all enter upon an eternal estate! Oh consider that **eternity is an infinite, endless, bottomless gulf, which no line can fathom, no time can reach, no age can extend to, no tongue can express.** It is a duration always present, a being always in being; it is one perpetual day, which shall never see light. O sins! this is, and must be for a lamentation, namely, that eternity is a thing that most men never think of, or else very slenderly. But as ever you would have your hearts chained to your closets and to closet duties, as the men of Tyrus chained their God Apollo to a post, that they might be sure of him; then seriously and frequently ponder upon eternity, and with those forty valiant martyrs, be still a crying out, "O eternity, eternity!"

Mr. Wood, after some holy discourse, fell a-musing, and cried out before all present, for near half a quarter of an hour together, "Forever, forever, forever!" Austin's prayer was, "Rack me, hew me, burn me here—but spare me hereafter, spare me in eternity." Certainly, if Christians would but spare one quarter of an hour every day in the solemn thoughts of eternity, it would make them more in love with closet-prayer than ever, yes, it would make them more fearful of omitting closet-prayer than ever, and more careful and conscientious in the discharge of all closet-duties than ever.

And thus, according to my weak measure, I have given *out* all that at present the Lord has graciously given *in* to my poor soul, concerning this most necessary, most glorious, and most useful point of points, namely, closet-prayer. I shall, by assisting grace, follow this poor piece with my prayers, that it may be so blessed from on high, as that it may work mightily to the internal and eternal welfare—both of reader, hearer, and writer.