

THE DISCOVERY OF THE PLAGUE OF OUR HEARTS!



Matthew Mead



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"Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins? Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in Heaven."
Lamentations 3:39-41

"They provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds, and a

plague broke out among them. But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked." Psalm 106:29-30

Preface to the Reader:

I have considered the *sore judgment* with which we have been visited lately, which so evidently declares God's wrath against us. So I believe this work is an essay which is very acceptable to God, and profitable to ourselves. I did the best I could to make *the voice of the rod of God* articulate for you. In the print of this book it lashes us, not only by God's wrath, but the sin he scourges us for, and the duty he would drive us to. I hope all this is found in legible characters easily understood on the page.

When I looked on *affliction as a medicine* for a distempered Nation, I thought it was exceedingly necessary, in order for it to work in us, to tell the nature, importance and use of it; and to give directions how it ought to be received. I acknowledge myself the meanest of ten thousand to accomplish such a great work. When I saw, or heard, of nothing so particular and distinct as I thought this important matter required—I humbly depended on, and implored Divine assistance to make this attempt. In this while I have guided myself by the Physician's own rules, and an impartial consideration of the nature of the patient. This was my great desire and hope of this undertaking: to work together with God's providence for some good to the Nation. And surely no man has cause to be angry with this intention, or with anything that flows sincerely from it.

Imagine a man was the meanest among the people in the time when Nineveh was threatened with destruction. What if he had given a catalogue of those sins they were guilty of? Such sins had to be removed which could prevent their ruin. I am persuaded that if a man did this, that the Prince, his Nobles, and the people would have been grateful to him, even though he would have spoken to them all with more plainness and boldness than I have done in this treatise. I confidently dare to expect the same from you. If our fasting and prayers are just for fashion's sake, they are useless. They must be in good earnest as the people of Nineveh.

I was fearful of two great miscarriages that I might be guilty of, which I have especially consulted against.

The first, of being swallowed up so much with a sense of *suffering* in sin, as to be indisposed for all profitable reflections on it. I would gladly turn men's eyes and thoughts from off this—to the *sin* that brought it. I wish them only to consider the *suffering*, so much as to inform themselves more clearly of the evil of the *sin*.

O what out-cries we may hear up and down: What doleful times these are! So many thousands dead this week—and so many last week! The *plague* got to this town—and then to that town! All business, as well as people, dead and gone! But were people formerly in this way affected, while we were bringing this on ourselves? Did they cry out then?

O how many thousands of *oaths* are sworn in a week! And how many *lies* are told! How many thousands are now *drunk*, and how many commit *lewdness*! If we had weekly bills of such sins brought in to us, they would far have exceeded the largest sums that ever yet mortal men have made. But alas! The idea of sin with most people, is a light matter. There are not half so many groans and tears for sins, nor any such complaints of them. Nor did any consideration of them make any sensible alteration among us.

Now this I would gladly obtain, to have those days of sinning thought as much worse than these days of suffering; and those sins as much worse than these sufferings. The *disease* is worse than the *medicine*. In the same way, a child's disobedience to his parents is worse than his being whipped. And he who should weep out of pity to the child, when he sees the child whipped, and yet could be content to hear him revile and abuse his father—I should think such a person of more sentimentality, than one of discretion. He is more concerned for the child's pain, than the parent's honor. This argues about him, that he has no true love for either.

Let me also give a caution, namely, that no man disclose so much folly as to argue that because in mercy God may abate and remove his heavy judgments, before many, or perhaps any of these sins I have mentioned are put away from among us, because we may have our former health and plenty restored.

It is much to be feared that you will see drunkards, and hear swearers,

after the plague is be ceased. And will you think, therefore, that these, and the same wickednesses, did not provoke God to afflict us first? Stay, if you are in doubt, until the great reckoning day, until you have heard all men's accounts cast up, and those actions which are then approved confidently pronounced as no sins.

I tell you that all those who survive here under the heaviest judgments on earth, which may be sent from God to punish and reform those that were guilty of them—will not escape final judgment. Hardened sinners may frustrate some ends of an affliction, and all wicked sinners are not followed here with sore judgments, as Pharaoh was for a time.

No, I say, do not justify all such sinful actions, though you hear them openly defended and applauded. And don't believe that men were punished under the plague simply because the world said they opposed their practices. This lower world is full of such mad mistakes and confusions. But I tell you, all this will shortly be set straight.

The other miscarriages that I feared men would be apt to run into, and which I have labored to provide against—was that though they might be convinced that sin in general was the cause of all our miseries—yet hardly that it was *their* sin, or their friend's, but somebody else's that they don't love. They shift it off to this or that party—whom *they* would have punished had they been in God's place. There is such a strong self-love in every man, that his imagination shapes God very much in a likeness to himself. Even the vilest sinners, Psalm 50:21, thought God such an one as themselves. And consequently they account themselves, and all their concerns dear to God. They would interpret all his providences in favor of them, to right their quarrel, and to avenge them of their enemies.

For in this way they would direct God to act, if they were ever called to his counsel. All would gladly say that God is of their party, and against those whom they are against. Every man will be more inclined to accuse others, than himself. No, and here it often happens, that those who have espoused any sin, will be so far alone from thinking ill of it, that they would rather accuse the contrary virtue.

Just so, godliness itself may sometimes bear the blame, or even the most

godly and unblamable men. The pillars of a land sometimes are accounted its pests—on which while some men blind with rage, lay their hands to pluck them down, they are about to do themselves.

Ahab will sooner count Elijah rather than himself, a troubler of Israel. Those who were the salt to savor a corrupt world—are accounted the filth and off-scouring of all things. And when any mischief befalls the Empire, then the poor Christians must be thrown to the lions.

In this way I fear among us, many bitter and undeserved censures will be passed by one against another. Such a great sin, I have done my best to consult against—while I have chiefly labored to bring every man to a reflection on himself. I have studied faithfully to deal, both to this man and that, his share in procuring our miseries. I have made the divisions and parties that are among us which occasion this censoriousness, one great cause of our sufferings.

Know this: it is only against sin that I have a quarrel. If any guilty person (as the Pharisees when Christ preached) shall think I mean him in this work, let him once again know, that it is not against a *man* small or great—but the *sins* of all who I am entered into this list. I hope they will rather see to forsake their sins, than vindicate them.

I dare undertake to evidence, that *sin* is that which brings *suffering*, and that those things I have mentioned as the sins of our Nation, are indeed such. Yes, and if it is not thought immodest to stall the reader's judgment for a second, I dare add, that I have spoken very great truth and reason in the matters that people will find most liable to exception, notwithstanding all the weaknesses and disadvantages in the represented material, which I readily acknowledge to be many and great. But I have already exceeded the due bounds of a Preface; therefore, let me conclude.

So far as I know my own heart, I have spoken nothing with a design to exasperate any, or to humor and gratify one faction by disgracing or inveighing against another. It has been my care to speak the honest truth, according to the infallible Word of God, and the clearest apprehensions of my own soul. I did this with a sincere desire to discover what indeed those sins are, which we especially suffer for—that the inconsiderate and

ignorant may be informed, the guilty humbled, wickedness rooted out, God appeased, and all our mercies, both spiritual and temporal, restored and continued. These designs shall be followed with my prayers—and I hope with yours also who read this little work. How far the success may answer, either I must leave to the reader's improvement, and God's blessing on my well-intended, though weak endeavors.

Yours in the service of the Gospel,

Matthew Mead, 1665

1. Sin and Suffering

"When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, and when a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel—each one *knowing the plague of his own heart*, and spreading out his hands toward this temple—then hear from Heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)" 1 Kings 8:37-39

"The Lord's voice cries to the city: Hear the rod and the One who appointed it!" Micah 6:9

The good and gracious God, the Ruler and Governor of the world, and the disposer of all events, does not do anything rashly or in vain. Therefore He has made it the duty of men wisely to weigh and consider his providences, and to learn instructions from them—as well as from the revelations of his mind in his written Word. We are bid to listen to the rod, though in the bounteous dispensations of his favors, we can assign no higher cause than his own mere grace and good will, which is accomplished in doing good to his creatures. Yet in the inflicting of Judgment which is his *strange work*, we may be sure to find something moving him to it.

It cannot be well conceived how man should ever be the subject of pain or sorrow. Such would not have happened, if sin did not render him changeable, and open a way for the sword to enter his affections, and give it that edge and force which causes it to pierce deeper, and to wound more sensibly. This is like a malady that arises from a wound of some kind, to be looked at only as an effect of intemperance, and is not to be quarreled at, but its cause to be blamed. It is like the surgeon searching into the festered place—it is not a wound, but a discovery of the depth of the sore, in order to aid in its cure. In this way the judgments which God sends on a people are only to be regarded as the symptoms of, and means to cure that disorder, and the distemperedness within ourselves. It naturally produces such sufferings.

It is not a breaking forth of some inward distemper, which is our sicknesses itself, but it is rather the effect of it. The discernable spots on the infected, are not the plague—but the signs of the plague. In this way are we to account the most grievous things that come on us—as the manifestations and fruits of something worse within us.

Now when men by outward signs find out those inward sicknesses that lodge within them—they do not labor so much to repress the outside sore, as to correct and *remove the inward cause*. When the *pox* comes out on a child, you don't drive them in, for if you did you would kill the child. Rather, the wise Physician will prescribe means for their kindly coming forth and ripening, that by them the corrupt sickness may be vented and vanish. He who is troubled with heats and flushings arising from his liver, would but play the fool to put on some bandages. Rather, he will take medicine that may inwardly purge him.

Even in this way also, suffering, having its birth and nourishment from sin, the way for the correction of that, is the removal of sin. And by no other means can a kindly cure be affected.

Sometimes an affliction may be taken off in greater wrath, than it was laid on: when people so revolt, that God will not strike them anymore, but because they are joined to their idols, will let them alone. This is but making a way for sorer judgments to follow. And so it is this way wherever we are taken from under the rod, before we are brought under

the yoke.

If outward sufferings turn to hardness of heart—then the case is desperate of such a people or person, however they may applaud themselves in their deliverance. This is like a venom which may seem to leave a finger or hand, but strikes to the heart. This is skimming over the sore, which will rankle beyond the possibility of a cure. This is the surest forerunner and saddest indication of the departing of the Spirit from us.

Now we must necessarily acknowledge that it is infinite mercy and goodness in our God when we have reduced ourselves to such a dangerous estate by sin—any way to reveal it to us, though by sharp and painful means—just so that these sufferings prevent our final ruin. O that I could instruct this into my own mind, and the reader's soul: that before we felt any pain, we lodged within us a greater evil; and that what we now feel proceeds from the hand of love, if we are wise to improve it.

Poor man, you cry out of poverty, loss of relations, sickness and pain, but did you not know that you carried worse than all these before, when yet you could go up and down quietly enough and never complain. Could you not swear, be drunk, commit lewdness, defraud, and oppress your brother, neglect the worship of God both in public and private, make a jest of Scripture, mock at holiness, and deride, hate, and persecute the most serious Christians?

These, these, O senseless sinner, were your sickness and misery which you were conceived and born in! This is all that evil with which you have brought forth. Sin brings all the most dreadful evils in the world. Hell itself is sin's natural offspring. But alas you felt no hurt, no pain in all this. You could have grieved the Spirit of God, and trampled under foot your Redeemer's blood, and run fresh spears into his side, and nails into his hands and feet—and yet never once reflect on yourself and say: What have I done?

Your sin was your pleasure, your sport, your trade. It was so sweet and so profitable, that you thought it as dear to you as your life itself. You could never believe you were doing yourself so much mischief—while you were pleasing your flesh, or filling your purse. How hard a task had he

undertook, who would have gone about then to have convinced you that your most delightful gainful sins—were indeed your wounds, your losses, and would be your undoing? Yet so it was.

He who is swallowing down poison because its sweet, or wrapped up in gilded pills—is then poisoning himself even while the sweetness is in his mouth, and his palate is pleased with the relish! Perhaps he may then laugh at him who cries out that it is poison, and bids him therefore as he loves his life, to spit it out. What, shall you persuade him that such a thing can be hurtful, whose taste is so pleasant? But even he himself when he feels it burn his heart, and grip and torture his inward parts—will then cry out he is poisoned, and roar out in the anguish and bitter torment which he feels. All this pain is but the working of that poison, which then became death, while it went down so pleasantly.

You may hear people when in sufferings, make sad complaints and lamentations that would melt one's heart to hear them. Then they can cry out: O my wife, or husband, or child is dead! What shall I do? How can I bear it? O what course shall I take to get bread for myself and family? The poor say: What! Must we starve for lack of relief? O how doleful is our case! And those who are under sickness, and struck with the visible hand of God—how do their hearts sink within them like a stone! How pale and ghastly do their looks become all of a sudden. Now they are even at their wits end. O, anything, is there anything for help?

What piteous moans they can make now! O their head, their heart, their back! Now with what astonishments and horrors, do they every moment expect to breathe out their last breath. With what amazing fears, what dark and dismal apprehensions of the state they are entering on, are they now seized. What passionate out-cries may you hear from them. What, must they die? Is there no remedy? No hope? Must they then leave the world they have loved so much, and lived in so long? And bid farewell to their friends and companions, their houses, and lands, their sports and merriments and gainful business—and all forever!

O that ever they should be born to see such a day! O that their dwellings should be within the reach of the contagion! O that this dreadful death of all others should befall them! O that they should be left in this way

desolate and forlorn, forsaken by all, abandoned of their nearest relations, in this time of their greatest extremity, when they most need support and comfort!

You may hear thousands of such hearty groanings and bitter wailings. But had you come in among these people, a few days before then—what other kind of men they were. How jolly and secure, following their pleasures or business. They would have laughed at you to tell them of a *death* so near, or of the *Judgment* that follows after.

How few, alas! How very few should you have then found among them, who at any time cried out: O blind mind, which is so ignorant of God! O carnal heart, which is so averse from his Laws! O how sinfully do I live! Base treacherous wretch that I am, in this way to depart from God! Vile and unthankful creature, that ever I should offend a God of such mercy and love! O that I was delivered from the power of my lusts, the temptations of Satan, and all the sinful diseases of my soul!

Alas! instead of such becoming language as this, you might from the most have heard swearing and cursing, foolish songs, filthy and vulgar speeches; or at the best, frothy, foolish, or worldly unprofitable discourse. Poor stupid sinner, when you were stabbing and destroying yourself—then you were seized with the most deadly infection. Then had it been no uncharitableness, nor absurdity to have written LORD HAVE MERCY UPON ME in capital letters on your forehead. Yes, wise and holy men saw it there in that wickedness that broke out in your life, and looked on you as more fit as a house of pests. They would see you as one not to keep company with, unless you recovered.

Now must we not all generally say that it is tender compassion in the great Benefactor to mankind, that he will so far concern himself with us in our miserable estate—as by any means to awaken us to a sense of it, while there is any possibility of a cure. Sottish wretches! they measure all events by their effect on their flesh and blood, and will not believe there can be love when they have such sore afflictions come on them. *Those to whom sin was sweet, will hardly be brought to like those potions which are administered on purpose to make it bitter. How will they loath the medicine, who love their very sickness!*

But all whose eyes God shall open by his providences, will see abundant cause to bless, and praise him for his love, in working them to a timely apprehension of that which otherwise had been their eternal ruin.

Tell me man, is it not a wonderful mercy to be awakened on this side Hell—no matter what God uses to wake you up? If your present pain makes you judge otherwise—then what would it be like if you came to hear the speech of those undone souls whose hopes have perished forever? They would soon satisfy you by saying that everything is tenderness, and a very great mercy which comes to reveal your sin, and prevent your everlasting misery. O lay this to heart in time man, and do not stay too long until your feelings give you a too clear and undeniable demonstration of this truth.

If now you cry out that you are undone, because your business is gone, your friends dead, or you are in danger of death—and do not look about yourself to find out and be affected with greater evils than all these, and so to escape much greater sufferings than yet you have felt here—then it is but a little while before you shall find arguments reaching to your very soul, which will make you acknowledge what I now say. O then, what will you think when you find yourself under the *vials of divine vengeance*, and have taken up your residence among the devils and damned souls in the midst of the burning lake of fire? What are all the miseries you underwent in your life-time—compared to the fiery lake? What desirable things will the most pinching poverty, the most grievous pain then seem—compared to what you will endure forever? What trifles, mere flea-bitings will you then judge famines, plagues, and heaviest judgments that can come on men while in the body?

O what would you then give to be where you were—when you thought yourself at the worst? You would then entertain such a state with joy and thankfulness—which before you thought the most miserable that a man could possibly be cast into? Then you will confess, that to be shut up from the society of men, has nothing of dolefulness in it—compared to you being shut up under the burning wrath of an unreconciled God! Then at length, whether you desire to or not—you shall see sin, and cry out that it is your sin which has ruined you.

Now you can in your cold, faint manner by rote, say that you are a great sinner, and perhaps may cursorily cry out to God for mercy. But then from the very inner being of your soul, shall you repent of sin, with such a kind of hellish repentance, as is proper to those damned spirits in the midst of their tortures! Such a one as your predecessor *Judas*, felt the beginnings of repentance, when he ran to the noose for comfort. Then you shall not only with those in Revelation 16:11, "pour out" your blasphemies against God, the breath of whose fury like a stream of brimstone kindles and keeps alive those unquenchable flames—but you shall also load yourself with heavier accusations, than ever any of God's ministers challenged you while you were upon earth. Then you shall feelingly confess yourself stark mad and infatuated, and wonder at your own stupendous folly—that ever you should so willfully and resolutely plunge yourself into that place of eternal woe!

This will be none of the least aggravations of your torment—to reflect on those many ways which God used with you, to have convinced you of your sin and danger before it had been too late. All this, which you made light of, and would not be taught by them. When the hand of God here was lifted up, you would not see. But in the end you shall see, you shall know, you shall experience. Then you will easily grant, that the sharpest suffering that had so shown you sin, as to have saved you from this wrath—would have been the happiest providence that ever fell upon you.

Would any man that has not lost his mind, as well as his gratitude, take it ill from his neighbor that should waken him out of his sweet sleep, when the house is on fire over his ears? Yes, though he pinch and beat him black and blue that he may speedily wake him up?

Now from all I have said then, I would gather that you understand that when the heavy hand of God is on a nation, as it is laid on for sin, so for the most part not merely for punishment and destruction—but to reveal to us the evil of our doings, that they may be repented of, and put away. And so there is much mercy in the midst of these judgments, if they are improved to those *ends* which we are commanded to make of them.

The greatest of these calamities to those who remain, are but like the sounding of a trumpet, the giving an alarm, shooting off a warning-gun,

the hanging forth of a white flag—and all speak to one purpose. Though the sins of a nation have been exceedingly great and provoking, by which the anger of the most holy God is justly kindled against them, which he sends these his judgments to testify—that yet God is willing to put away all former affronts that have been offered. He will do so if now at length they will become a repentant people, and with detestation of their sins turn from them to God and his holy ways.

If not, then his anger shall not be turned away, but his hand will still stretched out, until he has made a full end of them. He will follow them with judgment after judgment, until they are cast into the lowest Hell.

So that you see plainly that *God's rod* has a voice, and is a kind of sermon. But it comes nearer to the sense, and will force an observance more than *mere words* could do. We could choose whether we would read a Bible or good book, or regard a minister or godly neighbor, giving us this very lesson as plainly, but in a gentler manner.

We could stop our ears, or turn our backs, or harden our hearts—against all the most awakening, startling truths. We could make a mockery of the most dreadful threatenings in the Book of God, which are denounced against those very sins we committed. We could laugh at our faithful preachers and reprovers, and scorn at the offers of their love for our recovery. *When we are sunk into such a deplorable estate, we lack nothing to fall head-long into Hell.* God's withdrawal of his miraculous patience kept us out of Hell every moment. Then in infinite mercy our God, who like a wise Physician, suited his potions to the nature of the disease, and temper of his patients. He makes bare his omnipotent arm, and reveals himself and his will to us in a way most likely to affect us. But this will only be a good to us—if we who yet survive, are not obstinately bent on our own destruction.

Let us not then murmur or repine. If our disease is grown to such a height, that without stronger medicines it would be our death—then is it not all the reason in the world that we should submit to those prescriptions which are proportioned to it? Whoever you are that suffers, you have reason to be content, for it's your own doing. You might have hearkened in time to the plain Word of God, and so have escaped this

severer discipline. You who were willfully deaf to the still voice—is it not of yourself that a message is delivered to you in such terrible thunderings? If you had not closed your eyes against the gentle light—they would have never been so forcibly held open by the hand of God, to see those things which are as clear as the noonday sun.

If the Word of God had sunk into your soul—then you would have not in this way felt his arrows in your flesh, nor been taught this trial with briars and thorns, like those in Judges 8:16, "He took the elders of the town and taught the men of Succoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briars!" God does not delight in the pain and afflicting of his creatures. Yet he who has bidden parents by the rod of correction to drive out the folly that is bound up in the heart of a child—so he loves men, that he will not spare his rod when it may conduce to their advantage. When there is no way but either the gangrened arm or leg, or the life must go—who would not lose an arm or leg, to save his life? Still then, here is mercy.

Afflictions have a clear sense and meaning. Beside the heat that *scorches*—they have an *informing* light. *God might in a moment have snatched you from earth to Hell, and there have convinced you in such a manner as leaves no room for your reformation.* When now he has taken away your neighbor, and but *threatened* you with death, and afforded you some breathing-time for your preparation, and for the prevention of the endless damnation.

You who are reading these lines, might have been the *first* at whom God had leveled his arrows. You might have been snatched out of the world suddenly, without any other warning than the Word had given you—as it has happened to others. But since it has not so befallen you, whatever you may feel or fear further, you cannot but acknowledge that God treats you very graciously. *While you are on this side of Hell—you may learn much by the severest dispensations of God.* And though this seems like a cutting, piercing way of teaching—yet is it best suited to your dullness and senselessness, and most likely to prevail with you, as not needing so much pains of a particular application to yourself, which you would not be brought to in the hearing of the most searching sermons. It was but forgetting these searching sermons—and there was an end of all.

Now God speaks words which may be felt, which shall stick longer by you, and on which he will keep your most serious thoughts—whether you will or not. It required deep and frequent consideration to convince yourself of your lost undone estate by reason of sin, while you were swimming in plenty and prosperity, and could bid your soul to take its ease.

Alas! What is it to hear of the wrath of God, of the never-dying worm, of the unquenchable fire—while men feel that all well with themselves? They then looked on those very sins as essential to their happiness, which the Word represented as their misery. They were not then likely to think very ill of their sins, while they perceived they did not hurt them.

But now when God shall manifest his *hatred* of sin, and consequently the *evil* of sin by demonstrations reaching to the very bone—he who groans under these loads, may very readily infer, that *surely sin is an exceeding great evil, which pulls down such judgments from a compassionate God*. These present sufferings at the highest, are but forerunners of infinitely worse sufferings to follow—even everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord!

You must take an advantage of your afflictions, to inform yourself of the evil of sin in general, and of your particular sin. You must know that *sin is a plague*—and know that this is the plague of your own heart. If you do, then you are in a very fair way towards deliverance and healing. And this is made evident to us by the words of Solomon which we propounded at the beginning, which I intend not particularly to insist on, but to make them the foundation of a more general discourse.

2. Solomon's Instruction

"When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, and when a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel—each one *knowing the plague of his*

own heart, and spreading out his hands toward this temple—then hear from Heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)" 1 Kings 8:37-39

The importance of Solomon's words above, seems to be this doctrine: That any man under any calamity whatever, should be sensible of the sin which procured it, and take himself to God by prayer and true repentance, that he may find mercy. For such a man is fit to have the bandage taken off his sore, on whom it has had a healing influence, answerable to the end to which God sent it. God sent it, namely, to show his sin, humble him for it, and turn him from it.

There are two points I shall hint from these words:

1. That, we may very well turn this prayer of Solomon's into a promise, and conclude that what he begged of God—shall be granted to every man, in any place performing the conditions here described.

2. "Knowing the plague of his own heart." There is nothing more common in holy Writ, than the making words of *knowledge*, inclusive of the *affections* and practice also. To *know God*, frequently comprehends our whole duty to him. For our knowledge of him being the beginning and ground-work of all other duties, and producing them where it is in clearness and power—may very well be put for everything we do.

So here, to *know the plague of our own heart*—by which is meant sin, the disease of the soul—is as much as to be convinced of it, to see its odiousness, to be lively humbled for it, and sincerely resolved to forsake it. That it must be a working practical knowledge, not resting in mere conviction—is evident from the foregoing words. These words mention the prayer proceeding from those who know the plague of their own hearts.

The same also follows: *spreading out his hands toward this temple*—that is, make their addresses to God, with some kind of particular reference to the temple, where God did in a more special manner reside and manifest himself. And in this way Daniel in captivity opened his window toward

Jerusalem, (Daniel 6:10). Now he who should in this way come to God, what is it for? Not only for deliverance, but also to confess sin the cause of his misery. If this is so, then he must be truly grieved for his provocations of the most holy God—and this could not be without promises and purposes of a reformation.

Now I do not need to stand to prove what I before mentioned, that whoever is in this way affected, shall, if not be freed from the temporal affliction he lies under—yet he will be secured from its hurt, and have greater blessings bestowed. This, I say, I do not need to prove since the Scripture is everywhere full of examples and promises that demonstrate it.

And indeed it is fully evidenced in the very tenor of the Covenant of Grace, which assures pardon, and salvation, and all things truly good for us, on the condition that we come to, and receive Christ. None can do this but those who are sensible of their need of him, who have seen the evil of sin, both as to its nature and effects, and are desirous to be delivered from the guilt and pollution of it. This sense of sin, and aversion from it in heart and life, is true repentance. On this condition, was what Solomon prayed for.

God frequently promises mercy. See particularly his answer to this very prayer, and the promise he made to grant it, "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." (2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

Wherever then the judgments of God are more eminently inflicted on a people—it is a sign there are some heinous transgressions which have deserved them. If the plague, or any such calamity, seizes a nation, it speaks this much: that there is a plague in the hearts of that people. There is in them some such wickedness which provoked God to pour out his wrath on them. Sin is as the *body*—and suffering is usually as the *shadow* that attends it. The one is as *fire*—the other as *smoke* that proceeds from it. Therefore, by putting away sin—we can escape the

threatened wrath, or be rescued out of our affliction. This is very plain: if the knowledge and removal of the plague of our hearts, conduces to our recovery—then our being seized with it was our misery. Therefore the cause is removed, and the effect will follow.

These several truths are plain in Scripture, and the words we have taken notice of, naturally lead to them.

1. That God is the Supreme efficient cause of all the sufferings we lie under. "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?" (Amos 3:6)

2. It is for the sin of a People, that God lays these sufferings on them.

3. It is a most proper seasonable duty, in times of such calamity, to make an inquiry into our ways, that we may discover what is most likely to be the cause. What is that *Achan* which troubles us? This is the great thing to which we are called to consider, in the day of adversity. Accordingly, most of my business in my following discourse shall be the practice of this direction.

4. If we finding out our sin, bewail and abhor it, put it far from us, and take ourselves to God for mercy and pardon—then he will hear in Heaven, and forgive. He will remove from us our miseries, and restore his loving-kindness.

I shall only answer one objection, and then pass on to what I chiefly intended in this work. Some may say that they have been sensible of, and in some measure humbled for sin—and yet notwithstanding, have been held under as sharp and as long sufferings as others.

Here we must distinguish,

(1) between national judgments, and personal judgments;

(2) between the *ends*, and *reasons* why they are inflicted;

(3) between the cross, and its curse.

And so I answer:

(1.) If the Judgment is national, as war, famine, captivity, some great mortality, and this sent for a national common sin—then it cannot here be expected, that the humiliation of some few particular people should always serve for the averting such calamities. No, the righteous themselves may be involved in them.

We find there were many good men carried captive with the rest into Babylon, among which, were *Daniel*, and the three Hebrew children.

Indeed, sometimes we read of one or more standing in the gap, and preventing a deluge of wrath, as *Moses* often did, but there was then also some kind of general humiliation. For of the people it is said, "When God slew them—then they sought him," (Psalm 78:34). And though *Moses* prevailed so far, that they might not utterly be destroyed—yet very sore judgments were frequently laid on them.

Noah delivered only himself and his family—but not the whole old world. *Lot* himself and his children were delivered—but not Sodom and Gomorrah.

At another time, so great and general were the sins of the Jews, that God tells this Prophet: Even though *Noah*, *Samuel*, and *Daniel* were there, they could only deliver their own souls, (Ezekiel 14:14).

Ordinarily, it is a humiliation in some competent measure proportioned to the sin, which must appease the wrath of God which broke out on a people. When all *Nineveh* had sinned, and was threatened, it must be a *general repentance* that could prevent the execution of those threatenings.

(2.) Though particular people may not by their reformation procure mercy to a whole land, nor yet free themselves from the outward stroke which comes on the body of the nation—yet their labor shall not be lost, but God will have a special eye to them in the common ruin. What is in *wrath* to others—shall be in *love* to them. They shall have either such preservation from, or deliverance out of, the temporal calamity. Or, they

may have such support in, and advantage by it—that they shall have abundant reason to acknowledge that their repentance and supplications were not in vain.

Do not fear, poor Christian, if you are but a *mourner in Zion*, one whose heart bleeds for your own and other's transgressions. Though your dwelling is in the midst of profane, rebellious sinners—yet you shall not be lost in a crowd. It is not the oaths and blasphemies, and crying sins of those about you which can drown your prayers. God will hear your prayers, and one way or another graciously answer them. If your soul, your everlasting life, is given to you for a prey—then you surely have no reason to complain.

What, does the same disease and death seize you as it does them? It does not come for the same *reason*—nor shall it have the same *effect*. What, though you were carried in the same ship with traitors into another country, where they are to be executed, and you advanced to the highest dignity—was this any hurt to you? If death takes you from the many pressures of life, under which you may now groan, and from the evil to come, and translates you into the glorious presence and full fruition of the ever-blessed God—this is surely a different thing from being snatched away from your happiness into the society and torments of the Devil and his angels!

Therefore you have good reason to acknowledge God's *distinguishing mercy* in his dealings with you, which to your sense may be the same with what others meet with. I might add also the *spiritual advantages* which accrue to the godly by sanctified afflictions—but the other contains this in it, and much more.

(3.) Your afflictions may perhaps be more for *trial*, than *punishment*. So these may be continued, notwithstanding your endeavor to find out and forsake sin. But when they have worked that particular end for which God sent them—they shall be removed.

Or afflictions may befall you for the cause of God, and a testimony of a good conscience, and then you have more cause to rejoice in them, than impatiently to seek their removal. Whatever they are—see that you make

this use of them—to be more deeply humbled for, and set against sin.

Such sin is remotely at least the cause of all suffering. Behave patiently and submissively under the mighty hand of God—and in his due time, he will exalt you.

3. Why Does God Contend with Us?

1. It being evident that the knowledge of sin is so necessary to removing the heavy hand of an offended God from an afflicted nation—then surely, the great work we are all called to in this day of our sore visitation, is to give all diligence to know *why* it is that God contends with us. We should know *why* we have incensed him in this way, to pour out his wrath on us. By knowing this, we will be able to turn from our particular sins that he may turn away his anger, and comfort us.

And in order to do this, it is the primary duty of everyone in the land to call himself to a strict account, and impartially to look into his heart, and review his life. He must see what he has done towards the hastening of these judgments on us, and accordingly apply himself to God, to do his utmost for their removal.

Every man has brought a dried piece of wood to the kindling of the common flame—therefore every man should bring his bucket to quench it.

Here let me warn every soul to beware of a most dangerous temptation, where it is likely they will be assaulted. In other words, they must not think slightly of their own particular sins, as if they had little or no influence in bringing on us such grievous calamities. They often do this partly out of self-love, which makes us very tender how we accuse ourselves, and ready to extenuate all our own faults.

But also partly, because we may yet be free from the hurt, and therefore take but a cold superficial view of ourselves. Also partly, because when we

look on the evils in total under which the nation lies, we can discern no proportion between them, and our personal offences. This comes much from our ignorance of the heinous nature of the least sin.

Now reflect on yourself, reader, and tell me: Have you not been generally very ready to cry out that it is for the sins of the nation we are now afflicted? And would you not fly out very bitterly against this party, or that, this abuse and the other corruption in our Church or State? Yet in the meantime, you have been very backward because you have not charged and accused yourself as you ought, as if you were not a member of this sinful and suffering nation. Let your conscience answer whether this has not been your way, and judge whether this is a just performance of your duty. If every person in this way shifts the blame from himself—then where will repentance be found, and what is likely to become of us?

If there were an Army to go forth against the enemy, and one person should draw back, and say: What can he do? He cannot be missed in such a multitude, nor can he do much against such a numerous force. He therefore desires to stay at home. Then another comes with the same excuse, and so a third. At length all have the same reason—which indeed every man may pretend to. So, what is likely to become of the war?

And yet alas! how does this senseless objection generally prevail in the world, in a case somewhat different from this, namely, hindering that courageous zeal, and industry, for promoting true religion, and for the destruction of the Devil's Kingdom. Every member of Christ who is enlisted into his service, by the baptismal covenant, was engaged to fight under the Banner of Christ without putting in any *condition*.

But yet one will cry: What can I do against an overflowing torrent of wickedness? What can I, a weak, and single person do, for the advancement of holiness, against a wicked raging multitude?

What can you do? Why, shall nobody do anything, because every man is but one, and has many difficulties to encounter? Or will you therefore do nothing, because you cannot expect a success answerable to your desires?

Or may we not join and unite our strength, and all set shoulder to

shoulder, for carrying on of the work of the Lord? Be sure that you shall always have *difficulties* to try you.

It is your *heart which* God calls for. He does not need your hands. Why, man, if you were alone in all the world, having such a leader and captain as Christ, would you not stick to his cause, and keep to his colors, and die fighting? If you do not want to do this—then you do not deserve the name of a Christian. And if there are so few who seek the things of Christ—then with how much more vigor and resolution ought those few to bestir themselves. They should not forsake their Lord, simply because the rest of the world do. But still they should imagine they hear the awakening words of Christ to his disciples, sounding in their ears: "What, will you forsake me also?" But this was a digression.

Do not let, then, I say, the consideration of you being a single person, abate anything of the measures of your sorrow for sin. For if all act in this way, as all may have the same ground—then there will be none found to charge sin on themselves, and acknowledge God's justice in all his sharp dispensations.

Wherefore, whoever you are, into whose hands these lines may fall, my earnest request to you—yes, my strict injunction, is this: that you presently get alone, and soberly sit down to an intense study of yourself. Beg of God to help you in this work, and endeavor with all faithfulness, as in his sight, who will shortly judge you before all the world—to rip open to yourself all the *baseness* that has been lodged in your heart, all the *lusts* that have been entertained there. And consider well your *life*—what known *sins* you have been guilty of, and what *duties* you have omitted.

And then with all speed and seriousness, take yourself to God, acknowledge your own vileness, and plainly confess that it is this or that sin—your looseness, your covetousness, your pride, idleness, or voluptuousness—which may have helped kindle his anger. And own it as a token of undeserved grace, that all manner of woes have not seized on *you*, in your own person. While so many are afflicted, and taken out of the world before you—you have a warning to prepare for what may befall you.

See that you labor to represent *sin* to yourself, with all its heightening circumstances and aggravations—that its review may more deeply affect you. Help your meditations with thoughts of those doleful eternal miseries which most people now lie under. Consider that your sins, which yet are but the beginning of woes to the impenitent—think that these are no jesting matters. Consider what the sin is, which procured these judgments on you.

Think also of that matchless love, that continued patience, that clear light, those great engagements, purposes, and frequent promises—which you have sinned against.

Do this until at length, these considerations work you to such an apprehension of sin, that you cannot conceive of any suffering suited to its demerit, but the everlasting wrath of the most dreadful Majesty! Do this until you acknowledge not only your contribution to the present calamity, but that if the rest of the nation had been like you—it would surely have been all in flames before now!

Be sincere and thorough in this humiliation of soul, and take heed of neglecting any such consideration as may help on the same. Review yourself, your place, and relations—and what in them was expected from you, which you failed in performing, and accordingly lay it to heart, and judge and condemn yourself and behavior. If in any place of honor and service you have not improved your interest for rooting out sin, and for the advancement of holiness—account your negligence aggravated by the greatness of the talents you were entrusted with. Were you a man of wealth, ability, power—a magistrate, a minister, or a master of a family? Take a strict account of, and humbly bewail your unfaithfulness to your several trusts, and your carelessness of those duties which your place did peculiarly engage you to.

And do not think when you have discovered, and confessed sin, that then your work is over, as if by your formalities you had purchased to yourself a dispensation to continue in it. There are many who think they serve God sufficiently by going to church, and saying their prayers—and meanwhile make this their serving him, but a kind of indulgence for their sinning against him.

4. Putting Away Sin

When you have made this progress of *knowing* your sin, your next work in order to obtain pardon—is seriously and deliberately to resolve on *putting away far from you every known sin*, on mortifying your dearest lusts, and on a faithful performance of those duties common to all Christians, and those your abilities or relations call for. If you have been a debauched or covetous person, a careless mispender of your money or time, an extortioner, or oppressor, a bad landlord, or cheating tradesman, and neglecter of duty to God, public or private, or have lived in any of the same sins—enter now into a solemn covenant with God, that by the assistance of his Almighty grace, you will never again allow yourself in such a course of impiety.

Consider if you have abused your riches, and laid them out only in making provisions for your own or others lusts. Consider if you thought your dignity was above others, or dispensed your liberty of sinning without control, and accordingly have misimproved it. Consider if you have been unfaithful in the execution of justice with which you were entrusted—neither looking after sin to punish it, nor punishing it when it was revealed to you—but have rather been a terror to good works, than to evil.

Consider if as a *minister*, you have been regardless of the souls of those committed to your oversight, only striving to enrich yourself, not to better your people; or practicing those sins you have preached against.

Or, consider if as the head of a family, you have been negligent, not setting up the worship of God in your house, but gone from one day to another without so much as a serious prayer, nor have instructed your children, nor servants in the fear of the Lord. Whatever, in a word, your trust and unfaithfulness to it has been—confess and lament it, and resolve for the future to do your utmost to discharge your duty, to answer and fill up your several relations.

Here again, do not let anyone insist on that silly objection before mentioned: What can my repentance do to the diverting of judgments which flow in on us like a deluge! For if everyone, I say, used this excuse—then who is it that will pacify God's wrath by their reformation? But, if you for your part will practice what I have here cursorily directed, you do not know but others may do so also. So, if everyone would set to this work, your cavil would be wholly silenced and answered.

But again, you would grant it to some purpose for the whole body of the people to join in hearty humiliation and amendment of their ways, and know, that as to the greatest benefit that would accrue to a nation by such a general repentance—you shall procure it to yourself by this personal performance of your duty. That is, either the affliction itself shall be kept, or taken off you—or laid on in so much mercy that you shall either here, or in another world, bless God for the same.

I hope this advantage is not inconsiderable, when on the other hand, you remember how certainly your impenitence will cause your *everlasting*, as well as temporal ruin. And take notice from the text that God will render to every particular man according to his ways—but this I have before said something to.

O that now there were in us all such, sincere resolutions to search our hearts, and reform our lives, and with our whole souls turn to the Lord our God, from whom we have revolted! What blessed effects would we find in this wise and dutiful demeanor! O that I knew how to persuade poor souls to this course, before their infernal and deadly enemy, who now does all he can to harden and stupefy them—shall be fully seized of them, past all possibility of being delivered. Then scorning at all our endeavors, and challenging us to do our best for the rescue of such undone souls, who must be tormented by him, by whom they would be ruled.

5. Exposing Blatant Sin

If you are so far persuaded of the reasonableness of this duty I have been pressing on you, that you are desirous to know yourself and your sins, and would gladly find out, that you might expel the plague of your own heart—I may do something further to help you in your self-examination. I shall briefly endeavor to reveal what those sins in our nation are, for which especially we are now plagued by the visible hand of God. And may the Lord awaken us all seriously to lay to heart, and remove them far from us, so that God having accomplished his own designs on us may lay aside his rod, and show us his accustomed favor.

Let me exhort you, reader, to accompany me with your conscience, and do not let your eye still be turned off from the examination of yourself. If you see your own actions described, cry out: "Guilty, guilty, I am the man!" So proceed in your duty, as I have before directed, and shall not again repeat.

In the prosecution of this design, I shall say something:

1. Of those *notorious crying sins* which are to be found among us. Of these I shall need to say less, because they are so visible on us, and so readily acknowledged to be what they are, and because so many books are written to shame and suppress them.

2. I shall proceed to lay open such abuses and corruptions among us, which are not only sinful in themselves, but also in part, they are secret causes of the former, which yet perhaps may not be apparent to, nor acknowledged as such by all.

And once again, let me ask every reader to place himself as at the bar of God, and so to pass a true judgment on himself. Do not quarrel with the Physician. Do not fall out with the disease. Do not be more averse from hearing the discoveries of the plague of his own heart, than he would be to hear his Physician tell the symptoms of the plague—to convince him he was struck with it, while all this was but pressing an order to gain his recovery.

Whoever you are that are guilty—it is you who have wounded yourself. I would willingly show you your sores, that they might in time be healed. If

your resolution is not to have searched into them, which makes them incurable, though I may never have your thanks for the offer of my help—yet I know whom you will accuse as the cause of your destruction, which I would gladly have prevented, and shall do what I may in order to it.

1. At the front of those abominations under the effects of which we groan, we may well place **adultery, fornication and immorality**—whether we consider the provoking nature, or the commonness of it among us. This is a sin we often find attended with exemplary punishments in Scripture. This, together with their idolatry, we read of a plague inflicted on the Israelites, in Numbers 25, of which 24,000 died. For David's commission of this sin but once, was threatened to him, that the sword should never depart from his house, (2 Samuel 12:10).

And in the New Testament especially, how frequent are the prohibitions, and how severe the threatenings denounced against it! Whoremongers and adulterers, in a peculiar manner, God will judge. And for these things especially, we are told, comes the wrath of God on the children of disobedience.

How strict is our Savior's exposition of the Seventh Commandment, making a *lustful glance* the breach of such a sin? And Christ on mentioning that, immediately follows the threatening of the whole body being cast into Hell, without the cutting off the right hand, and plucking out the right eye, the subduing the dearest lusts, and renouncing the sweetest sins, (Matthew 5:28-30).

With what repetitions of the same do we find it mentioned, where it is spoken against, inculcated again and again—in order to make the deeper impression? And when the lusts of the flesh are named, usually this is reckoned for the greater part of them in various expressions, signifying much of the same thing, (Colossians 3:5). "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity . . . For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:3-5). Galatians 5:19 says, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery,

fornication, impurity, lasciviousness." This sin we find aggravated much by the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 6:13-14—even to the end of the chapter.

This sin is that which in a particular manner defiles a man, and renders him indisposed for the indwellings of the Holy Spirit. This loathsome wickedness especially hardens and brutifies men, and sinks them from God into a life of lustful passions, and stupefies the higher parts of the soul, and renders them unqualified for a converse with that God who commands all who will approach him, to be holy, as he is holy.

This is a sin which on many accounts, breeds as much confusion and disorder in the world, as it does in particular men's souls. It must necessarily therefore incense the most High God, to see his creatures endowed with reason for the governance of themselves, to whom he has prescribed rules for their walking—to degenerate into such brutish sensuality, as to be hurried away by their own lusts, to such bestial impurity.

But alas! How notoriously infamous has our nation grown for filthiness and lewdness! It is not the loathsomeness of that disease which in a just judgment attends it, that will deter men from this more loathsome sin. Yes, it is grown so common that by many it is looked on as a very light matter, no way so heinous as God and his preachers would make it. And they are ready to censure God's laws as severe, for not allowing them the privileges of brutish sensuality! So strangely does frequency in sin, wear out its heinousness! A sensual life even blinds the understanding, and bribes the conscience, until at length with much ado, men almost persuade themselves, that they may do what they have often done, and are resolved still to persist in.

Whoredom and wine take away the heart, (Hos. 4:10-11). Even in a literal sense, the spirit of whoredoms cause men to err. And can it seem strange if at length God makes use of arguments, which such brutish creatures themselves are capable of, to prove to them that their filthiness is highly provoking to his glorious majesty.

God is of purer eyes, than to endure to behold the least iniquity. His Word condemned this before, as plainly as it could speak. But vile

wretches, whose senses are their masters, would not understand it. They did not acknowledge his commands. They either did not *believe* them, or would not *consider* his threatenings. They did not consider his promises of an everlasting glory. Such ideas were too thin and spiritual for them to relish, or be allured by. Can you tell them of rivers of pleasures at God's right hand? They must have their sensual filth to tumble and wallow in. They must have their chambering and wantonness, and lustful romances. Nothing must be denied which contradicts their sensual desires.

Is it not just that they should then be dealt with that which is suitable to their natures? That since nothing else would do it—sense and feeling may at length assure them that their sweet and pleasant sins are a displeasure to God, and most pernicious to themselves. And if neither seeing the beginning of God's wrath on others, nor feeling it themselves will prevail with them—God has more severe judgments in store for them. Will they, or will they not—be most passionate with hearty acknowledgments, that while they were satisfying their lusts, they were most studiously contriving their own ruin and treasuring up wrath for themselves against the day of wrath! If neither poverty, nor shame, nor plague can bring them to such a confession—then *Hell* shall bring them to this, and much more!

But as if we were not content with those ordinary sins of adultery and fornication, it is reported that we have among us, those who practice homosexuality! This in Italy had been no such monstrous thing—but can it be accounted less in England? Both heathen and Popish Rome indeed, has still been infamous for this, among other abominations.

Now let any man but seriously consider the holiness of God, his infinite purity and justice, and with it reflect on his omnipresence, his all-searching eye that is on the most secret sins. Think but how he has been a witness of all that lewdness that has been committed in all places, in the greatest privacies and retirements. Neither bars and bolts could keep him out; nor could drawn curtains, nor the darkest night—hide impure sinners from his view!

If we consider these things—shall we wonder if for these wickednesses the Lord is wrathful with us, and will pour out the vials of his fury on us?

How justly might God take up the complaint against us, which he did against Israel in Jeremiah 5:7, 8, "How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were like well-fed lusty stallions; Every one neighed after his neighbor's wife!" And what follows, verse 9, "Shall I not punish them for these things?" says the LORD. "And shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?"

And O that now all those whose consciences condemn them for these things, would presently arise, and take shame to themselves, and do no more so wickedly, lest worse things yet befall them. And the good Lord may awaken those who are in authority to greater vigilance and industry for the future in searching after, punishing and suppressing this impiety by which we are so polluted. O that such a visitation is now on us, which has so much the same cause with that laid on the Israelites, (Numbers 25). May it also have the same speedy and effectual cure, which we may read in Psalm 106:29-30, "Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, and the plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stopped!"

The two next sins I shall mention, may pass for appendices to this first, as having been too apparent in their promotion of it. Which yet if they were not, may on other accounts be deservedly reckoned among the provoking sins of the land.

2. The the licentiousness of the THEATER, where wickedness and wantonness are more effectually taught—than it is cried out against in the pulpit. Let those who favor the theater talk what they will of their advancing virtue, and shaming vice. I should put it among one of the wonders of the times, to hear of any true Christian man going to a play. There people hear the sacred Name of God profaned, his Word jested with, and true religion itself derided. This is no way to make men more devout.

If to hear immoral discourse, and see shameful people and actions is the way to get modesty—then let us all flock to the theater. It would be easier to let youth be brought up . . .

in a whorehouse, to learn chastity;
in a tavern, to avoid drunkenness;
in a casino, to keep them from cursing and gambling.

I have heard but few count it any great wisdom in that nation, where they were accustomed to make their servants drunk, to show their children the odiousness of it. Surely there was less charity in it, to make some commit wickedness, that they might prevent it in others.

But at the theater *vice* is often represented in a *commendable* way. Such will soon turn into immoral actors when they are gone away—who were even now spectators of it. Whatever is to be learned at the theater, let the conversations of most who plead for them, and frequent them, evidence this to us. And from the lives, to the consciences of the greatest admirers of the theater, do I appeal, whether ever they got any real good from them, and whether they have not often got evil.

The precious time which is misspent either in seeing, or afterwards talking of them—is not to be looked on as a thing of no importance. However time is slighted by those wretched drunks, who knowing neither God nor themselves, have more time than they know well what to do with, and therefore are glad to run to their plays and sports, for nothing else but to help them away with it. Let not such complain, if a plague at once ease them of all that trouble, and carry them into eternity! There they shall never more have one of those precious moments of time which here they were weary of, and did not know how to improve. If they knew nothing but trying to please themselves while on earth, then God will cast them into a world, where he will find them employment enough, but of such a nature, that they shall wish ten thousand times over that they had spent all their days in the greatest diligence and strictness to have prevented it.

Let the giddy careless ones of the world cry as long as they will: What hurt is there in this, or the other recreation or merriments, which only wears on their time? If there was any hurt in the fire and brimstone which fell on Sodom—then that which caused it, was no such harmless thing. Among the sins of that city, *abundance of idleness* is named for one, "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter

had pride, fullness of food, and *abundance of idleness*." (Ezekiel 16:49).

Again, were it nothing else but that vanity and frothiness of mind, and unfitness for all religious duties, which the theater naturally produces, I think this was enough to make all sober people regard them as little better than pest-houses!

Would our immoral youth, and idle dames have kept out of these places of infection, where folly and iniquity tainted them both by their eyes and ears—there might have been no such infected places, which we must be careful to avoid. For my own part, I must necessarily say, that I took it for a dishonorable reflection on our English Prelacy, which a modern poet makes his observation in a preface to a Book of Comedies, that Bishops attended plays. I can scarcely forbear crying out against this.

When playhouses are opened, what sad effects are likely to follow! Surely the primitive Christians, whose moroseness in refusing to behold the Roman Games (whatever difference there may be between them, and our Stage-plays) was one great crime objected against them, would not have thought such lewd and immodest shows agreeable with their profession.

It is not my business now to argue what a Play is in itself, or what it may possibly be refined to. But I speak of them with all those corruptions with which they are now attended. And I would hope the same policy, a little more improved, which has shut up the Play-houses now, to prevent the spreading of the infection, will keep them so, to hinder its return. Whoever may be displeased with this motion, I am very confident, God is not, and then I am indifferent who is.

3. The latter of the two sins, which I mentioned, as related to the first particular, is *pride*. Here among all its sorts, which might very well deserve our notice, and with which no doubt God is provoked—here I mean especially the **pride of apparel**. This is a sin grown either so impudent, or so universal, that our pulpits do of late days seldom meddle with it. I am sometimes ready to think that ministers are ashamed to concern themselves with such base and ridiculous things, (though I wish they are not silent for fear of offending their fine hearers, which may chance to be of the best in the church). But if people will be so ridiculous

and vain, and manifest such childishness and folly—then surely their teachers must follow them, and condescend to reveal to them all their mistakes; and the subtle ways of the deceiver of souls, who is very ready to play at any game for the ruin of poor creatures. He holds more in his slavery by this very vanity we are now insisting on, than is ordinarily thought.

We may find the great Apostles not thinking it below them to give precepts in this matter of pride in dress, "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel. Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God." (1 Peter 3:3-4). So also, "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God." (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

These commands have been violated, and those guilty should lay this to heart. I would not be thought of their opinion, who place their religion so much in foods, drinks, or apparel, whether Papists in the former, or Quakers in the latter. Yet I am as far from thinking that religion does not extend to these things. For though piety is seated in the heart—it gives Laws to the outward man.

I remember, it is an observation of a most judicious and learned Divine: That few of those errors or sects that have risen up among us, but have called on us, to have regard to some neglected truth or duty, as he instances in several.

Doubtless, this pride in outward apparel, is not such a slight matter as it is commonly made. "The LORD says: The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald." (Isaiah 3:16-17). And have we not had multitudes of such walking in our streets? Read on in that chapter from the 16th verse to the end, and tell me then whether God takes not notice of, and is not displeased with this vanity in apparel. Is this not

indeed to be proud of our shame, since clothes themselves had not been used, but for that shame which sin introduced?

4. I may well annex this to the sin of **shamelessness**, both as revealing and promoting it. For what's the design of all that artifice, cost, and pains which people bestow on attiring themselves—but to appear handsome and rich? And what is this for, but to coach others eyes to be fixed on them? What are naked breasts, and painted faces designed for—but as traps and snares for the impious beholders? And the dress itself by the lascivious is made but a more plausible kind of pander.

By the texts above mentioned, it seems that only women were accustomed to be guilty of this folly. The delicate youths of our time, will not allow that gender to engross this sin—and shame to themselves, that the young men are resolved to share in it. *O the intolerable expense of money and time, for the satisfaction of this base monstrous pride!* How many naked backs might be clothed with half that cost, which is lavished to put a man in a fool's coat, or to hang about them such necklaces, as may serve people to stare at?

Let the guilty think how to answer for their liberality on their lusts, in the day of final account, when all talents shall be reckoned for! By that time at the farthest, if they are not convinced that people of honor and estates, had been better distinguished by their examples of charitableness, than by gaudy garments, or rich jewels, let me pass for a false prophet.

Let all those who are at so much charge in their attire, to let the world know they are *somebody*, remember this: that God did not entrust them with estates to make show of, but to use for his service.

I think anybody will say, that he is an unfaithful steward with a witness, who when his Lord has given him money to lay out in necessary uses—shall throw it about the streets, to let people know what store of money he has been keeping. You who condemn such a one, be sure you do nothing like him. Whoever you are that has been guilty of this fault, surely you will acknowledge that this is a day which calls for the laying aside of your fooleries and ornaments—and rather to cover yourself with sackcloth and ashes. But if yet your pride will not allow you to part with them, think to

yourself what your naked soul shall wear in that infernal place where God has expressly threatened to throw the proud. Dives there must not have his silk and fine linen—but instead of them, the purple flames of Hell are his unchangeable clothing!

Is it any wonder then, that the Israelites were plagued for worshiping the idol which was made with their earrings and jewels, (Exodus 32:3, 35)? We meet with the same punishment for a sin not much different, even for making such *toys* as our idols. Strange judgments may well follow strange apparel. Yes, such that wear it, God has plainly threatened, "And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel," (Zephaniah 1:8). And what strange apparel for both men and women have the Devil, pride, and France with their fashions, helped us to? And they who caught this sin one from another, pleading *fashion* for their justification—are they not justly afflicted with a disease that is contagious too?

The spots which pride and depravity, those plagues of the heart, sent into the face before—are they not fitly punished with spots of another hue! Is it not exceeding just, that those who were so far falling in love with their lovely carcasses, that they were wholly devoted to deck and trim them? If they have such loathsome botches and scabs on them, should this not convince them how little better than carrion is that flesh they so much pamper and adorn?

Let them now think what pleasure or ease is to be had from putting on their most splendid and finest array—when the plague-sores shall be running all over them! This is even much-what the same example that Herod had from his royal apparel, when he was eaten up of worms in Acts 12:21-23. And if in such a case, they would have little mind to stand adorning and trimming themselves—then let them know that the ulcers and sores of their *polluted souls, and proud hearts*, call for a speedy, and earnest regard, and deep humiliation. If these were once cured—such vanities would be thrown aside. The Lord grant all those who survive the plague of England, that they may take this warning in time—before their bodies are humbled to the dust, and their souls to Hell, for their daring, impudent pride!

5. Another heinous sin which has overspread our land, is swinish DRUNKENNESS and GLUTTONY. This also may well be joined with those before mentioned, as being the ground and incentive of all other lewdness and wickedness. But alas! How has the commonness of this vice, and men's being accustom to it, taken away those odious apprehensions which Scripture helps us to see, and all sober men have of it? O, how are our taverns and alehouses, in all parts of the country, visited always! How does our whole nation seem even ready to reel into its own ruins, being seized with the vertigo of an epidemic drunkenness? How genteel, and fashionable a thing is it now grown, for men to be drunk in the company they are engaged in? How many tricks have they devised for maintaining this sin, notwithstanding the most express injunctions and proclamations from the Word of God to the contrary?

So general has this practice of excessive drinking grown, that both the gallant and the clown, rich and poor, young and old, yes, women as well as men, city and country—are sadly infected with the blight.

How can men entertain their friends, or renew their acquaintances, or drive any bargain, without taking themselves to some bar? Yes, how frequently are drinking-matches appointed, for no other purpose, but to pour down their liquor? What multitudes are there who rise up to drink strong drink, who tarry at night until wine inflames them? Yes, to such a height of wickedness are we grown, that as if there was some excellency in sinning, men strive for supremacy in it. To be able to drink down others, characterizes a very manly trait. Such enemies do we have to the cross of Christ—whose God is their belly, whose glory is their shame.

And is there not the same reason that our crown of pride and the drunkards of England should be trodden down, as well as of Ephraim, "The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet," (Isaiah 28:3). Is it not just, that those whose intemperance has often deprived them of their reason, should be taken with a distemper that may strip them of its use? That in those very streets where men have staggered and fallen down dead-drunk—they should there fall down stark-dead?

The same might be said of **gluttony**, and luxurious feastings—a sin more confined to the greater sort, who can make sufficient provisions for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof. They abundantly confirm what the wise man has told us: That the prosperity of fools destroys them. And one wiser than he has expressly affirmed, though surely very few believed it, that rich men enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with great difficulty. How much money is expended to furnish the tables of these gluttonous Epicures? How do they sacrifice God's creatures merely to their lusts, eating only for pleasure. They have lived in pleasure, and been unrestrained, nourishing their hearts, as in a day of slaughter, as James speaks in James 5:5.

What has been the life of too many of our gentlemen, but to eat and drink, and sleep, and rise up to play? Here's all the improvement of the many special engagements God has laid on them to honor him that they of all will do least to his honor. What an exact description may we read of many of them in Amos 6:3-6, "You push away every thought of coming disaster, but your actions only bring the day of judgment closer. How terrible for you who sprawl on ivory beds and lounge on your couches, eating the meat of tender lambs from the flock and of choice calves fattened in the stall. You sing trivial songs to the sound of the harp and fancy yourselves to be great musicians like David. You drink wine by the bowlful and perfume yourselves with fragrant lotions. You care nothing about the ruin of your nation." Read on, you may find their doom.

If men will bid their souls to take their ease, eat, drink, and be merry, well may they expect quickly to hear: "Your souls shall be taken from you!" And when they are in this way provoking God to anger with their eating and drinking—then what wonder is there if his wrath falls on them, while the meat is in their mouths? They so far forget their own natures, and the use of his creatures, as wholly to be devoted to the satisfaction of their raging sensual desires, which they ought chiefly to have denied. If, like unprofitable burdens of the earth, they fed themselves only that they might live longer to taste the pleasure of their delicious foods and drinks—then how just is it that when like swine they were fatted, they should there be brought to the slaughter!

6. As the next provoking sin which is widespread among us—is

swearing, cursing, and profaning the most holy Name of the dreadful God. This is a sin less excusable than debauchery, because I do not know any sense which is gratified with it. Though it is less bestial—yet is it more diabolical! O the horrid blasphemies which have been daily belched out by the black-mouthed sons of Belial! A person is so likely to hear the name of God blasphemed, that he cannot walk the streets of the city without stopping his ears. The life, the blood, the wounds of our dear and precious Lord, are tossed to and fro, by the mouths of wretched swearers. Truly, their tongues are set on fire by Hell! We wonder that they do not set our whole nation in a flame!

O it is well for us that our God, who is mercy itself, rules in the world! How quickly would all patience, though meeting in one person, be quite tired out, and worn away! These hellish exhalations streaming forth from the hearts and mouths of corrupted men, by which they have assaulted even Heaven itself—might justly have been kindled by the wrath of God, and have been returned on our heads in showers of fire and brimstone! The polluted breath of these wretches have infected the very air we breathe! Could those volleys of blasphemies which have been discharged against the glorious Majesty, do any other than turn to a black cloud, which should light heavily on us?

Some think it is impossible for the soul of man so far to sink into the devilish nature, as to sin for no reason—to sin without a regard to some carnal interest. But if any instance will give evidence of it, I think it is swearing and cursing! It is possible, I know, for anger to issue in cursings. Sometimes a desire to be believed, or an ignorance that they do amiss, may betray them into it. But for men to interpose their ordinary discourse with foul-mouthed blasphemies, priding themselves in them, as if they were noble—what excuse can be invented for such horrible sins?

No, when men shall set themselves purposely to swear, and devise new blasphemies—what possible excuse do they have for this? And here may I refer those strange, unheard of prodigies of profaneness. Such wickednesses is too abhorrent to be ranked under any ordinary topic, such as killing men in a bravado, spilling their own blood—yes, doing such to the devil himself. For such I do not know what to call them, as these are we reported to have had among us; no, (can you imagine it

reader?) far worse than these, which let those mention who are masters enough of our language to render them in fit terms. I profess, they are so vulgar and evil that I cannot.

They are not ashamed to own themselves as the devil's vassals, but they dance in his chains while all men hear their cackling. What other design can these swaggering sinners have in such vile behavior, but audaciously to affront the great Majesty of Heaven and earth, in the vilest manner they are capable?

Ah, besotted wretches, let me speak to you in the language of the Prophet: What, could your mind find no other way to vent itself, nor your malice, on any other object? Do you have no other or cheaper way to undo yourselves? Were you afraid that you would miss entering Hell? What? Did you mean by your blasphemies—to dare God to his face? Would you force him to give a convincing evidence of his wrath? If so, I hope you are satisfied by this time—if not, you shall be shortly.

Were you resolved to see how far his patience would extend? Did you fear he was so merciful, that you would never feel his wrath? Or were you in such haste to be with your everlasting companions, the devils and the damned—that you thought your judgment lingered, and damnation slumbered, and would therefore do your best to hasten it? Or were you so fully bent on the satisfaction of your lusts—that you were resolved to pursue them, even to the burning lake of fire?

Are you resolute to do all that in you can before-hand—to revenge yourselves on that God, who will treat you so severely in Hell? Or were you now getting used to the language of Hell, that you might not have to learn it, when you are thrown there?

You may think that these are strange questions—but not so strange as the sins I am speaking of, and for which, I can scarcely assign other reasons than such as these. Shall we wonder when such rebels have risen up against the Lord—if he grows jealous for his great Name, and rises, and vindicates his glory and power from the contemptuous affronts of insolent mortals!

Moreover, how many times have people in their execrations, wished that the plague might take them, their children, servants, or cattle? And can they find fault, if at length—that their desires are granted? Yes, how many roaring ruffians have we got, who, as if they were already entered into familiarity with devils, make nothing of it to curse themselves to the pit of Hell in their common discourse! These are those who can scarcely speak a sentence without their profane blasphemies. Were their tongues plucked out by the roots—it would be a small punishment in no way suited to the heinousness of their crimes!

Let them stay a while longer in their contempt of God, and His threatenings. They shall too soon find to their sorrow—that all their accursed prayers are accomplished! The devil, whom they have so often wished to fetch them, shall very shortly have that commission which he eagerly waits for! Then let them say whether the dreadful God is to be jested with and blasphemed. Then at length shall they hear that terrible question thundered against them: Have you provoked me? says the Lord. Have you not provoked yourselves into the eternal damnation!

7. Among the rest of our common sins we may account COVETOUSNESS, together with all the effects and branches of it. Such branches are oppression, extortion, bribery, injustice, uncharitableness, and grinding the faces of the poor. I put all these together, as having some relation to each other, and being all neglects of duty between man and man.

If idolatry so often brought the plague, or other sufferings on the Israelites—then why may not *covetousness which is idolatry*, by the same reason bring it on us? Is it not as displeasing to God to have men adore a heap of gold and silver, or their houses and lands—as an image of gold made up into human shape? And is it not as great a sin, for the heart to run whoring after these things—as to bow the body to an idol? And how are men almost everywhere set with all their might and main to thrive, and rise in the world, to lade themselves with thick clay, and to lay up their treasures here on this poor earth? Was it not time for us then to be told, and told quickly, what we were doing—that we were not yet at home, and must not therefore think of settling here?

Single deaths of men when there died now one, then another—had but little effect on us, to make us sensible of our own mortality—and therefore multitudes are swept away before our eyes to see if that will have any more influence on us.

With what unwearied and uninterrupted pains and diligence did most drudge about their earthly affairs, from morning to night, weeks end to weeks end, without any serious regard to the business they came into the world for—the salvation of their souls? They were so deeply fallen in love with present things, that they did not dream of death? And with it they were so plunged over head and ears in their cares and businesses, that they could not find a time for any serious consideration of the matters of their souls.

How just is it then, that God should take them off by his hand, if they did not know how to disengage themselves for the world? God may snatch them away from those estates which they knew no better how to improve—but were even nestling themselves in them, as their durable possessions. I hope all who are engaged in such affairs, will call themselves to a strict account whether there have been no such unjust sentences pronounced either in condemning the innocent, or acquitting the guilty—that may have provoked the just God to anger against us. And let all merciless rich men, cruel extortioners, oppressive landlords lay to heart their unmercifulness, rigor or injustice to the poor, to the fatherless and widow, whose cries may have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty, (James 5:4), and caused him to rise and plead their cause, by sending his judgments on a hard-hearted generation.

Doubtless that great lack of charity and Christian compassion which ought to be in us, towards our brethren in their necessities and miseries—may very justly have hardened God himself against us, and caused him to be deaf to our cries and prayers. How many have had their money and precious things which they had hoarded, left to strangers, or rifled by thievish hands—which they might in their life-time so well employed for Gods honor, and their own good? But alas, among the many that profess the faith, how few are there who will take a promise from God as good security? And among so many who say that they love God—how few have manifested it by their love to their brother?

Has the matter been mended, since we have been under this sore visitation? No, rather it has been worse! O how men shut up their compassion against their poor and needy brethren? They have allowed thousands to starve for lack of needful supplies, while they have had enough for their lusts, and to spare. They do not (which yet in such a day especially is our duty) pinch their own back or belly to have afforded them relief. Men have been guilty of this cruelty while many of them had reason every day to expect their own death. But they have seemed resolved to hold, and grasp all as long as possibly they can, and to cleave closer, if they knew how—to their dear Mammon, of which shortly they must take their sad, and last farewell. O! who but infidels would not have sent their treasures before them there, where they expect shortly to be themselves translated.

The sin I chiefly intended under this head, is the common dishonesty in buying and selling, men's defrauding and overreaching each other. This is a practice which I fear London has been more guilty of than Corinth, which was charged with it, (1 Corinthians 6:8). And it concerns citizens and tradesmen especially, to inquire into themselves on this account, as being most exposed to temptations to it.

You, who yet survive, examine your heart—look back on your former course of life, in your following the world. Does not your conscience accuse you for having grown rich by lying, cheating, and deceitful ways? Has not your conscience many times flown in your face, for your notorious falsehoods, and crafty projects, and unlawful devices, to put off your wares, and enrich yourself?

Alas, men are ready to plead a kind of *necessity* for their sin. They say: If they should always be upright, and plain, and true—then they would never survive. What a matter of course is it with tradesmen to tell multitudes of lies to almost every customer. They can go their ways, and wipe their mouths, and there's the end—so they think. But God will not put up with it. Just so that they can now get a pound or a shilling—how little do they regard the time of reckoning with God for all? They do not know how to keep up such serious thoughts in the midst of their noise and bustle, in buying and selling. But if they can't, God will take them off

their hot business, and give them leisure enough to consider what they have been doing. And has he not done this?

All that men could think of, was that money was to be gained—and it did not matter how they obtained it. And well had it been for them, if God had made it no more a matter. But believe it, he has taken a strict notice of all your ways, and records them with greater exactness than you were accustomed to do your debts in your account register!

See your sin described and threatened in Micah 6:10-13; after he had spoken of the Lord's voice crying to the city by his *rod*, verse 9 then follows, "Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed?" Then, "Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully. Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins."

O how many are there that will be religious, as far as coming to church, and being devout there, and making some external profession—who yet in their dealings are starkly evil, and will be dishonest for a small gain? In the church, and perhaps a little in their closets, they can afford to do what they call serving God—but in their shops they do nothing at all. O by that time all is reckoned for, when the money is gone—but the sin in getting it must be answered for. How will men wish, and wish again they had been clear from this guilt, though they had been the lowest beggars in the land?

Now, how just is it that man should be snatched from those estates to which they never had a true title? And if indeed they cannot drive a trade without so great miscarriages—then is it not time that their houses and shops should be shut up?

6. Trampling God's Mercies

Now, I must sum up much in one point. We have been a people guilty of

willful and malicious contempt of God, his Gospel, his ministers and his people—and neglect of all true religion, as ever any nation of the world was. We have done this even as we have enjoyed the means and opportunities for, and lain under the engagements to reformation that we have done.

How have we trampled our mercies in the dirt, or thrown them in the face of the Giver! How soon have we forgotten his rod—when we have just been under its pain? How have we despised the threatenings of further wrath denounced against us by his Word and ministers! How has even professed *Atheism* abounded, that has made a scorn of, not only the duties, but doctrines of Christianity? By their long impunity in wicked courses, were men more confirmed in their atheistical conceits. Was it not fit then that death should reduce them to their right mind, when they are so willfully deranged? But especially for practical atheists, who while they profess to know God, they do not glorify him as God, but in works deny and dishonor him. How do they abound in our land!

Except but some formalities of external performance, and public worship, and a mere opinion—how little appearance is there of true Christianity among us? Do we not seem rather as a cage of unclean birds? Look into the court, and university, the city and country, all sorts and conditions of men; and say then, whether are we not overflowed with profaneness, which follows with a deluge of wrath to wash it away?

Nothing is now so strange, as serious holiness and strict living. To be a diligent server of the most holy God, is made a matter of reproach. To live up to the principles of that religion which we all pretend to, is to expose one's self at the least, to scoffs and jeers. All religion is now accounted delusion and hypocrisy. Serious discourse is but fantastical triteness. To mention any word of Christ or his Apostles, without making a jest of it, or the sacred Name of God, except in an oath, or to take it in vain—is an offence to many. To admonish and reprove a drunkard or a swearer, is to become a busy-body, and self-conceited. To speak of God or Christ, death, judgment, and eternity, and the great matters of religion—is the way to have some disgraceful title presently put on you. Godliness itself is looked on but as a faction, and as such despised and reviled. Its most holy professors, stigmatized with such names, as being designed for their

disgrace, too plainly show what is their fault—even purity, precise and holy walking before God.

Now may we justly revive the complaints made by godly ministers in former times. Such men walk ever so conformably to the law of church and state. They only endeavor to avoid the sins of the times, and in their place and calling to bear witness against them, endeavoring to live holy, exemplary lives. They promote godliness in their own families, and among their neighbors, and presently they shall be called *Puritans* (for that was, in Bolton's phrase, the honorable nickname of Christianity in those days). They consequently have less favor than any Papist, or carnal professor of the Gospel.

The most powerful and awakening preaching, and serious, affectionate praying—are disgraced.

And here is the root of the afflictions that have so long lain on us—even for such sins as these!

O how justly may God take up against us, all those complaints that we find in his Prophets. He has sent his messengers early and late, giving us precept upon precept, line upon line; calling to us: O do not do these abominable things; they will be bitterness in the end! And yet we have turned the deaf ear. No, when we have pretended to inquire of the Lord concerning our duty—yet when it has been revealed to us, we have at least in our works, said: We will not do all that the Lord has spoken, but we will walk after the ways of our own hearts—we will never live such strict and godly lives. We are content to live as we will, and never make a stir toward godliness, even with so much preaching in our midst.

How have we mocked God by our pretenses to serve him—when our hearts have been far from him! And those very people, who in the church were confessing their sins, and praying, that they might live a godly and sober life—when their devotions are ended, will do little less than deride godliness, and run into an excess of riot, and jest at those who are *precise fools*, who do not run with them.

These kinds of people are zealous for some ceremony or custom which is

of little concern—and rail at all who are not of their stamp, as disobedient, factious, and fanatical. How is the service of God dwindled to a *mere formality*, and many understand no more by it, than using some particular form or mode of prayers. By this they think to purchase Heaven sure enough, and make amends for all their neglect of personal and family-duties, for the earthliness of their hearts, for the viciousness and disorder of their lives.

O how have fools made a mock of sin, and looked on it as a trifling thing! How many pretty pleas and excuses have they got for whoredom, drunkenness, and the most monstrous pride? If the plainest Word of God contradicts their lusts—then it shall be of no value with them. Some try to evade God's Word, others hear it and just simply have nothing to say. Yet both set their wills against God's commands, and disobey them.

Have not we even wished that there was never a Bible in the world, no God in Heaven, and lived as if indeed there was not? And alas, how small a remnant is there who have escaped such common pollutions? How few that have been deeply affected with the dishonors done to their heavenly Father? There are few who have stood on the Lord's side, and been faithful to the cause of holiness. These have been but as the gleanings of the vintage, as after the gathering of the summer-fruits, here and there, one in a town; and these have been the wonder and scorn of the rest. These have been the song of drunkards. They, together with that Word they walk by—have been the sport of those whose hearts have been merry; as Sampson was to the Philistine lords. They and their Scripture serve the profane gentleman to show his mind, and help the poet to give substance for his play. These for the most part are looked at as the most pernicious ones in the places where they live. And on them malice has its narrowest eye.

He who departs from evil, makes himself a prey. They have hated, and put to silence him who has lived a holy life. They have abhorred him who spoke uprightly. We have arrived to a most doleful state, when the most exact *obedience* to the laws of God is accounted disgraceful—than the most open *violation* of them.

How has God waited long, and made the power of his patience to appear

striving with us in the ways of love. He has been mingling corrections with his mercies, that he might prevail with us to pity ourselves, but all in vain. He punished us with the sword, and kept us long in the furnace—and we are coming out less refined. Again, he blessed us with *mercies*—but we did not improve them. He has threatened, when he might have destroyed, and born with us long to prevent our ruin—and yet nothing would work. We have grieved his Spirit by our stubbornness and rebellion, and have begun to think that because he kept silent—he was such a one as we, and that he liked well enough our ways. We did this because his judgments were not speedily executed, and so our hearts have been fully set to do evil.

Were we not ripe for destruction? Was not our ephah full? Is it then any wonder, that at length—God is risen to plead with us, in a manner that shall make us know and feel that he rules in the world, and he will by no means acquit the impenitent? Though he bears long—yet he will not always bear with a stiff-necked generation. Could we expect any other treatment, than that God should make bare his arm, and visit us for these things, and ease himself of his adversaries, and avenge himself of such obstinate condemners of his laws and authority? What! Shall the lion roar, and the beasts of the forest not tremble! Is God angry—and shall not we fear? Does he shake his rod over us—no, lay it on us—so that thousands feel it in their flesh, and all hear the sound of its terrible lashes—and yet do we not tremble? Shall not our haughty countenances change, and the joints of our loins be loosed—since now there is an invisible hand which has come forth, writing such bitter things against us?

Has God such a sore controversy with us? Has he done so much, and yet will he yet do these and these things against us—and will you not yet prepare to meet your God, O England? O the dreadful senselessness and stupidity of the hearts of our people! How few are yet careful to learn righteousness, by the judgments that are among us! Notwithstanding this day of adversity—how few will be brought to *consider*? Is not this a direful presage of further wrath—even an utter destruction that is coming on us!

O what a spirit of slumber and drunkenness has possessed most! If it is not so with those about you, reader? Though people hear of thousands

dying about you, and have daily reason to expect their turn should be next—yet how regardless do they appear of all due preparations for it as ever? They flatter themselves with a conceit that yet they may escape, and that death shall not come near their dwellings—and so put off all thoughts of it. They are taken up with the very same businesses, designs, and pleasures, they were always accustomed to.

But what should we say—can sword, or famine, or plague, or any outward affliction work on them—who are nothing bettered, but rather hardened by commands, promises and threatenings from God's Word? Can the rod plead with, and importune them—as the Word has done? Will sickness inform, command, argue and seek out so affectionately—as the minister was accustomed to do? Where Moses and the Prophets might not be heard—then what can prevail? Cutting them up with the Prophets, and slaying them with the words of his mouth, would not affect them. Hosea 6:5 says, "Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you."

No doubt, God has his chastisements which setting on, and enforcing his Word—do often humble and reform souls. He has also those punishments by which he destroys. And if men will strive against his Spirit, and resist it's workings, and shut their eyes against the light, and condemn God's instruction, yes, harden themselves under correction, and rather hate the God who makes them hurt with pain, worse than the sins that procure it, like those in Revelation 16 who blasphemed God when they were in anguish—then what can be expected but the final ruin of the people who are guilty of such stubbornness and impenitency! O! that this were not the case of multitudes among us! May the Lord awaken those who are yet in a capacity to have a timely prevention of such a doleful misery!

7. Duties of Private Christians, and to Ministers

I would beg all private Christians to lay to heart their lamentable dullness, and uselessness in the places and towns where they dwell. O how *little* are their neighbors and acquaintance, I wish, I might not say their families, better for many of them! So little do they make religion their business, but in all their conversation are even like other men; only plodding on in a lifeless profession, and track of duties. They appear a little zealous for some opinions of their own—but not for the things of God. It is time for them to be raised out of their heavy, lukewarm state—and to be made to mind and relish a little more the weighty truths and matters of religion.

Reader, are you an honorer of Christ, and a lover of mankind? Why tell me then—is it not a most lamentable thing to consider, that almost all the world, yes, almost all the Christian world, is drowned in wickedness, and that there is so little savory salt in it? There are so few that study and labor to make the Gospel obtainable among men in its life and power? How do most seek their own things—and how few seek the things of Jesus Christ?

Some are too busy about *mindless recreation*, the *petty trifles of the world*, which—yet to those, who are swallowed up in them, seem weighty and important—rather than to mind what befits of men's immortal souls.

But all you, the ministers of Christ, if indeed you take his work itself for your honor, pleasure, and wages, though many of you may lack those encouragements which are so requisite and desirable for your success—yet, are you awakened to do all the service you can to your Lord and Master? Let us not stand accusing any for the removal of our opportunities, while we have so many opportunities still before us, if we had the hearts and skill to use them. How glad would the primitive Christians or our Protestant Martyrs have been of those privileges we enjoy, though they might earnestly have desired more?

What, sirs, are there no poor souls near you who cry aloud for your help, to save them from the burning lake, to rescue them out of the jaws of death, and snares of the devil, by whom they are led captive at his will? These, these are they on whom especially you ought to employ all your skill and pains.

I know the godly also call for strengthening direction, comfort, and quickening. But surely your principal work is not just with them. The miserable creatures that are at the grave's mouth, and yet do not know what they came into the world for—require speedy and seasonable help. O how many thousands may now be out of your reach, whom you once might have spoken to, but did not! What hinders you from going to such, and discoursing to them the matters that concern their everlasting peace? Cannot you watch for opportunities when they best have occasions to hear you, and are most likely to regard you? Can you not go to their houses, and take occasion to converse with them, and be inculcating on them the great truths and duties of the Gospel?

If you never formerly took this course of private dealing with your people—then set upon it now; for you do not know but it may be more effectual than all your former labors were. Some who have tried, have had good success. However, you will have comfort in doing your duty. O go often, as you have time, among your poor neighbors, and see in what a state their souls are. Do not be so uncharitable and hard-hearted, as to see them dropping into Hell, and yet do nothing to prevent it. Though it is among strangers you are cast—yet acquaint yourselves with them, and do them all the good you can. Put them on reading good books and take account of them, and learn what their knowledge of religion is, and accordingly instruct and advise them.

But far be it from me, to presume to give directions for the work where others have done it fully. You know it well enough, and what the outcome may be, if you would but set to it with all your might. O follow then the example of Paul, who went about from house to house, night and day—warning everyone with tears. Do you think that this is not preaching the Gospel? Do you think that is only while you stand on a high place in the midst of an assembly at church? Did not Christ preach the Gospel to a woman alone—and Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch? In some respects, it is evident that personal discourse has a great advantage on public preaching. And why may we not expect God's blessing on this, as well as on the other?

Now sirs, we have a happy opportunity of manifesting what pure love to the Gospel will do with us, without any hopes of a temporal reward. What

moved you to preach to your people before? Was it a desire to save the souls of your people? Why I hope their salvation is as precious in your eyes now, as then—and do not they as much need your assistance now? Why then do you not continue it? Do not say that the people will not bear it, for many will. Try them once again, and where any are obstinate, let your love and courtesy do its utmost to overcome them.

O let us but work our own hearts into lively affectionate apprehensions of the great concernments of souls, and study more what God is, and why he made us. Study what the death of Christ means. Study what it is for a soul to be saved or damned forever—and we shall scarcely be able to refrain speaking to all we come in contact with. We shall rather ask every man we meet, whether he has yet done his best to make sure his everlasting happiness? We will want to know whether he has yet got out from under the wrath of God, and out of danger of Hell! These things will be ready to burst from us in the very streets. O had we but that zeal, and those affections which these matters deserve, and will very well warrant—then what work might we make in the world—yet keeping in all due bounds of sobriety and prudence.

Perhaps we might be counted madmen for our pains, as Christ himself and the Apostle Paul were. But remember then, I would have you spend your zeal on the things that are worth it; proportion it to the weight of the truths you insist on. I would not have you take these pains to make men of your opinion in small matters of controversy. Beware that promoting a party will spoil all your work. Labor to make them members of Christ. What need do you have to what particular church they are members of, or in which they differ from you in matters that do not concern their salvation? Do the best you can to heal all breaches; make none, widen none. Let our practices witness to God, to the world, and to our own consciences—that we are true lovers of piety and peace.

See that you have no other aims but God's glory—and he will own and crown you for your labor of love. Do not say, this is a *difficult* work; but tell me whether it is not *needful*. If the devil and his instruments sit still—then you can sit still as well. Remember what a covenant you made in baptism, besides all your other engagements since.

Think what you live for, and where you expect to stand shortly—and then tell me whether a life in this way laid out for God, will not then be your comfort? O for the Lord's sake then, all you his servants up and be doing, and do not fear. God will be with you—what are you afraid of? Enemies? Do you think this will procure you more hatred and sufferings? Will this awaken powers to greater jealousies, and cause them to abridge you of the liberty yet reserved? Never fear it sirs.

I am pressing you to advance the gospel—this is a work that must and shall be done. For, God has said it, and he will see to it. O sirs, pure, simple, and uncorrupted Christianity deserves all our time and study and pains to advance it—for it has such comforts and crowns. Such would make a man even long to be suffering for it; and the more he suffers, the more he will still love, the greater he adheres to it.

Christianity is a religion of such a force and excellency, that it defies oppositions, and scorns all bounds. It awes its greatest adversaries, and a prisoner at the bar with it may make his judge on the bench to tremble, and the sturdy jailor that even now whipped him, come quaking to beg a pardon. Do not fear prisons, for the Gospel can never be bound. Let this alone be your rule, and do not value whatever law or will of man shall contradict it. Kings and emperors with all their officers, and armies, edicts and authorities—are but trophies to its power. Like dams they will make it rise higher, and overbear all before it.

Experience confirms what I say. This cake of barley bread will tumble down all the tents of an army of Midianites. The noise of its trumpets, the light of the lamps (though the pitchers that bear them, these earthen vessels, our bodies, may be broken) and crying out. The word of the Lord, and his Son Christ Jesus will discomfit innumerable armies, and make them run, and cry, and flee. This is the Gospel, and let all who read these lines say: Let it go on and prosper, let it run and be glorified, and strike its healing sword to the hearts of its adversaries.

Only see that you make the cause you work for the same that Christ and his Apostles drove on in the world—and then how joyfully may you suffer for it, no matter what men call your actions and designs.

It is nothing strange to suffer for Christ from nominal Christians; nor for peace and truth from men that call themselves orthodox and Catholic. This has been often in the world! Let then the weighty, but much neglected doctrines and commands of the Gospel be urged with all earnestness, but lesser things less regarded. *Talk less of the times—but more of eternity.* Do not stand discoursing who should have power in the church—to men who are yet under the power of the devil; nor of a ceremony or form of prayer—to those that do not know God, nor their own souls. What strange things would these be to catechize a heathen in? But O labor to work men into the true temper, and spirit of religion, which consists so much in love to God and our brethren. Then the new nature that is in them, the inward relish of their souls, and renewed principles of light—will enable them to judge of things that differ, and everything that matters in such a moment, so God will reveal such things to them.

And so at length, through God's assistance, I have come to the *end* of my task. I have endeavored to show how we have from the highest to the lowest done amiss, and provoked God against us. I have also mingled directions, so far as my intended brevity would permit, for the performance of those duties that may appease his wrath, and make us happy in his favor.

O, that these weak endeavors might have an outcome answerable to their design! Then how confidently dare I say we would be a happy people, by becoming holy, which is all I have aimed at.

What shall we say then, and what shall now be the outcome of God's judgments which have been on us? Shall we be bettered by them or not? O, one would think there would scarcely be an obstinate sinner left in the nation after this! We should all with one consent return to the God who has smitten us, from whom we have backslidden. One would think we would now imitate the children of Israel, whom after eminent judgments we find entering into a covenant, to seek and serve the Lord their God, to which their Kings were accustomed to call them. And O, that God would put it into the heart of his Majesty, to engage all his people even from one end of the land to the other, to enter into such a solemn vow; that we will in all things be careful to walk in those ways which God has enjoined us,

and not in anything voluntarily break his holy Laws. Of what a blessed consequence would even this be!

But this and all other such great wishes, let us reserve for our prayers; and give me permission to demand: Whether all that God has done shall be lost on us? What, shall our nation still be drowned in sin? So soon as ever the *rod* is off from us—shall we go again to our old sinful courses? Shall profaneness abound—and religion be despised again? Shall taverns, and brothel-houses, and play-houses be frequented—and God's worship slighted and neglected again? Will the abominable and filthy, be so still? Shall blasphemy, and swearing, and cursing, be as loud as ever? Will men be as busy as ever to gain the world, and seek their sinful pleasures? Will they make light of God's threatenings and promises, and laugh at the talk of death and judgment, as they were accustomed to do? Shall God still be mocked with formalities—and dishonored by men's lives? Will the hater of godliness still rise higher in his rage? Will the execution of *justice* be as much neglected as ever? Will men still close their eyes against the clearest light, and reject the apparent and only means for the reconciling our differences, and establishing our peace on sure foundations? Or will they yet strive to aggravate the bitterness of men's spirits, and pursue their design of crushing them into the very dirt? Shall we yet be rent and torn with animosities and divisions? And shall those who ought to cure, keep up and increase them?

Shall we still, instead of accusing ourselves and sin, dip our pens and tongues in gall? O God forbid that it should be this way, that we should grow worse under the physician's hand, and that none of his strongest medicines should work! Shall we cause God to complain of us, that he would have healed us, but we would not be healed? That in vain has he smitten us, for we would not receive correction? O that such a poor worm as I, could do anything to prevent such a sad conclusion. Woe to us, if God departs from us, leaving us to ourselves, resolving to strike us no more, but *letting us alone* until he destroys us in our sins. My words are likely to spread but a little way, but O that they might have some effect where they fall.

8. A Word to the Reader

To you, reader, let me take myself. What have the workings of your soul been, while you have been reading these lines? And what influence have they had on you? What, has not your conscience struck you, spoken the truth, and told you plainly that *you* have been a troubler of the land, and have helped to bring the plague on us? In the sight of God, I demand of you: have you not been guilty of some of the sins described in this book—covetousness or pride, luxury or oppression, or the like?

And what now? Do you condemn yourself for your folly? Will you make all speed to get peace confirmed between God and your soul—and a separation made between your soul and sin? Or on the other hand, are you in a rage that your sin has been too plainly displayed, and you are too much disgraced? Are you bothered at your *darling sin* which you are resolved to keep—though you have Hell with it? Are you not framing excuses, and saying: I cannot believe that such and such things which I have a mind to, are heinous matters, and so displeasing to God. Or else are you remiss and stupid, never thinking this or that, only tossing over this book, and passing this censure on it, and throwing it down without any more regard? Truly this is what I most fear; for this is the general prevailing temper. O, therefore that I could but rouse you to an apprehension of yourself, and your own soul's estate before God!

Reader, surely you are one that would not willingly be damned. Will you then hearken to a most reasonable request I shall make to you, before I conclude? You have now been reading these pages awhile, which have been as a bill of indictment against our land, and have deciphered what our special, crying sins are. Will you now, when you shut the book, get alone, and spend but as much time in reading your own heart and life, and search and see whether none of these sins are yours? It may be that *soul examination* is a work which you never did in your life as of yet—but will you now bring your heart to it? It is in vain to ask you whether you will forsake your sin—if you will not set on examining yourself to find it out.

What will you say then before God, to my earnest request? What, shall I

be denied? Is it a great matter I ask of you, to withdraw yourself from the noise and bustle of the world, and of your own vain thoughts, and to make a diligent search into the state of your own soul—that being sensible of your sin and danger, you may yet get help? Will it do you so much good—or tell me plainly whether you had rather be damned? For I will assure you, your damnation is never likely to be prevented without serious consideration—and that is what I beg you to do.

Which will you choose? To set on your duty—or to venture on eternal Hell? Surely your mind must answer one way or other. Reader, be awakened, do not take these for passing words. I speak this from God to you. It is God who looks on you; he knows the thoughts and intentions of your heart, on your reading these demands. And whatever course you take, whether you will examine yourself, and forsake your sins, or not—yet you cannot say but God has given you fair warning. He now stands over you with his *rod* in his hand, and asks you whether yet you will seek and serve him?

If your self-examinations shall have made way at all for such a demand, I would like to know in the next place: whether you will strive to put away sin, every sin from you—or will you not? Are you yet willing to be reconciled to God? Let it be known to you, O sinner, whoever you are—that there is yet hope from the Lord your Maker and Redeemer.

What would the damned give for such a word? If you will but impartially consider your ways, and bewail your sin, and loath it, and turn from it, and from the world—to the Lord your God, with all your heart, resting on his mercy in and through his Son, setting on a course of serious holiness, and continuing in it to the end; doing this, be assured that your soul shall live. Something of this I spoke at the beginning, and cannot say more on it now. Here is enough to inform you (if you did not know it) what your duty is. But are you willing to perform it? One would think you would soon be resolved as to what to do.

The question is whether you will do your utmost to change your heart and life, that you may be saved? Or whether you will go in sin, and be damned? I have told you on what terms you may yet escape your ruin.

You know that this must be done. It must be done speedily—or perhaps never at all. *If you delay one hour—you may be in Hell the next!* God has born with you long, now he is making shorter work; he will not always wait for you. He demands your heart quickly. He will have this—or your heart's blood.

Away with your sin then with all possible speed; if you retain it, it will be your damnation. A cry has gone out from Heaven against it, and the man in whose hands it is found, shall surely die. Then cast it away, if you love your life, your everlasting life.

But what are you? Are you one of those senseless, brutish, blockish souls, that a man had almost as good spend his breath talking to a stone wall, as talk to you! Are you not moved with all you read or hear, or do you forget as soon as the noise is out of your ears? Do you now lay aside the bible, and go about your accustomed business, as if you had not been reading for life or death? Do you think that the bible is a mere story which in no way concerns you? Will you now rise up, and go to your worldly cares, your company, or vain discourse—instead of getting alone with God having humble acknowledgments of your sin, and earnest cries for mercy?

If you were infected with the plague, and had been reading what medicines you should use—would you lay aside that book, and never mind it anymore, as if you had done enough to *read* about your illness, without taking care to *apply* the remedies? And will you now be guilty of a madness as much greater than this—as sin and Hell are worse than the plague and death? Are you resolved though Christ himself should kneel to you, and implore you (as he does through me) to search your heart, and review your ways—and detest your sins, that he might save you? Would you not grant his desire, nor ever put yourself to so much labor as conversion will cost you?

If you are such a stupid, resolute sinner who will remain in your old ways—then do what you will. Yes, and believe all shall be well enough with you for all that. What can I say to you more? God be judge between you and me; you are destroyed, not because you could have no help, nor because it was not offered to you—but because you willfully refuse it. But, poor

creature, my heart even aches for you, and I am hesitant to leave you in this wretched, dull, distracted temper. If death, which is now so busy abroad, should find you—then you are undone forever. O, that yet I could speak something that would make you feel and fear.

Tell me then, you who are now so bold and resolute, so careless: do you not think that you shall die? What will you do then? Think on it, and think again, I implore you. Is it not some great odds that the physical *plague* may shortly reach you? What course will you then take, when you shall see those tokens of God on you? Which way will you look, or what will you do for help? Then go to the sins you have loved so dearly, and see what comfort they will afford. Now call for a beer, or a whore—never be daunted. Shall one like you quail, who has mocked the threatenings of the Almighty God?

Here's a sudden change indeed! Where are your companions? All fled? Where are your darling pleasures? All forsaken you! What, will your money and bonds, do you no good? Why should you be dejected? Go cheer yourself, review your good purchases, think of your high titles and rich revenues! Go gentlemen—get to your mirror; powder and curl, paint and spot, deck and adorn yourselves, as you were accustomed. What, do you take no pleasure to view your pale faces? Do your hearts sink within you like a stone? Poor creature, what has the world left you? The world you so dearly loved, that Heaven was but a trifle to it! What, have you misplaced your heart on a treacherous friend, which fails you in your greatest need?

Must you now in sadness groan forth your wretched soul into another world? Now, now wretch—what has your sin and carelessness brought you to? Now where is your life of mirth and sport? What will you do now, when your own comforts have left you—and God loathes you, and rolls out your death-bed with howlings and disdain? What, are you going to begin to call on him now? Can you think up a few good words that might serve your turn? Read Jeremiah 2:28, "Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble!" Go get your own gods. See whether they can help and deliver you. Do not say that I would drive you to despair; no, I would gladly prevent it; and so may you, if you will but hear in time. And that time is

just now, for death is even at your back, and perhaps will take you up as soon as this book is laid down!

But perhaps you are one who thinks that you are safe, and that none of this belongs to you, because you may be recovered from the sickness, or are able to get out of its reach. Maybe it is so abated, that you do not fear it, therefore you are ready to foolishly cry with Agag, that the bitterness of death is past. O, be convinced of your lamentable depravity, for you may yet be sawn in pieces for all that. Read Amos 9:1-4, "I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape. Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."

Tell me whether God will not find you out or not. You have run away from the city perhaps—but not from your sin. You therefore you carry the plague along with you, which sooner or later will break out. But though you escape the plague, are you then secure? If you can but outlive this mortality, do you think all is well then? Is all the danger over? No! Stop there, sinner. God is not done with you. Believe it, the worst is yet to come! Alas, man—death, judgment and Hell are still following behind you. But they are coming quickly, and they will overtake you at last, all of them, if you do not turn to God in time. You may patch and piece up your moldering carcass as long as you can; and shift here and there from this disease or that; but after all, be assured that you shall die. And after *death* has done its work on you—the *judgment* will come, and the *sentence* will be executed.

If yet you are fully bent to keep your sin, let me beg you to think a little of what that Hell is, which you are leaping into. O, think what the wrath, the flaming, unquenchable wrath of God is! Do you make a joke of it? It is

because you are an infidel, or have lost your mind. I know that you cannot ponder what Hell is—because you have more pleasant things to take up your thoughts. You don't want to think about death and Hell. Therefore you laugh and sing, and merrily throw away your hours, as if no hurt was near you.

But you are standing and tottering on the very brink of the bottomless pit! And all this while, how many devils whom you do not see, stand gaping to receive you, and some of them are even laboring to make sure you come there! And multitudes of deaths are waiting for a commission—any one of them can thrust you into Hell, and then farewell all hope forever. O, spend but one hour, or half an hour—in the sober thoughts of eternity, and go on in sin if you can.

Good reader, let me entreat you to this course. But if you answer: "I have something else to do!" Then know that you shall shortly have nothing else to do but to feel that which now you will not be brought to think of, that you might avoid it. One moment's experience in Hell shall at length convince you more than all your hearing or reading would.

You count the plague, famine, sword, earthquakes, thunder and lightning—to be terrible things. O, then what is Hell, the very *ocean of that fury* of which these are but small drops? It is there that God will make the very power of his hottest intolerable wrath to appear! In those rivers of brimstone, those scorching flames of his anger must you lie down forever! O, forever, and ever! Man, think but awhile how long that is!

Might but one damned soul's return to describe this place of torments to their old companions—what a language would we hear! Might but the Rich Man himself have been sent to his jovial brethren, who little thought where their departed brother was, nor what they themselves were hastening to—in what a passionate manner would he have begged them to forsake their sin, which leads to endless woe! How would he have disturbed them in the midst of their merriments and feastings, and even have made their hearts quake, and their hair stand on end—with his terrible account of Hell?

But, reader, if you are one who will be frightened from Hell by no

descriptions, but from those that have seen it—then you will never escape that place of endless punishment. What do you say after all this? Are you yet resolved to prepare for death, and prevent damnation—or not? I can say no more.

If you desire this course to escape eternal death—then turn to God in sincere faith, and sound repentance, and a holy life. Such is not cheap and easy, but it is a gainful and happy way to have prevented everlasting misery! May the good Lord have mercy on you, and work these convictions with power on your soul, while they may do you any good.

9. A Word to Those Who Truly Love Christ

I shall finish this book with a word or two to all those who truly love and fear the Lord. O sirs, you who have known God, and are well acquainted at the throne of his grace, to which you have often in time of trouble and need made your recourse—and there have received seasonable comfort and supply. All you to whom prayer is not a strange work—now arise and take yourselves to God with all seriousness and speed. Cast yourselves down before him, bewailing your own sins, and the sins of the land; and *lie in the gap* to stop the further proceedings of his wrath, that he may not root us up from being a people. Pray that we should not continue to be a wicked and rebellious people—for then destruction from the Lord will certainly be our portion. Strive with him to remove his rod—but above all, to work those ends to which it is appointed.

I have endeavored to show you, and those who are sensible of it, what sins we are suffering for. O, pray that every abominable thing may be cast forth from among us, and those blessed works accomplished, which would make us in the eye of God and man a glorious and happy people. Beg earnestly that the gospel may be advanced, holiness encouraged, wickedness suppressed and punished, our divisions healed. Pray that from the prince on the throne, to the beggar in his hut—there may be an effectual reformation of all we have done amiss. Then we may yet find favor in the sight of God, and enjoy his residence and gracious presence

among us—then he would delight in us, and rejoice over us to do us good.

Besiege Heaven with your humble and affectionate prayers. God will not be deaf to your cry—he knows your voice which comes from your very soul. He will not reject the petitions you present with pure hands. Your prayers are his delight—all you who are his humble, upright ones. It is you who must now prevail, or we are undone. Though you may be a hated, derided and undervalued people, by those among whom you live—yet your intercessions must be accepted on their behalf, through our great intercessor, or else they are likely to perish. It is you who must run with your censers, and stand between the living and the dead, so that the plague may be stopped! It is the incense and perfume of your prayers that through Christ, must appease an angry God, and clear an infected air.

It is not the lip-service of the profane sinner, or the formal hypocrite—which will do us any good. If he is one whose heart is far from God, and whose life is a provocation to him, who still goes on in his sin—then God will not hear his prayers. The howling of a dog is as acceptable to God, as such hypocritical devotion. Shall the tongue which was just now cursing and swearing—come presently to pray, and think that it will be accepted? Does God delight to hear his name taken in vain, as these senseless lost sinners do in their solemnest services?

No, no! It is the fervent prayer of you who are indeed righteous, which is likely to be effectual and prevailing. You have the spirit of supplication interceding within you, assisting you with unutterable sighs and groans; and you have a powerful *Advocate* enforcing your requests. Therefore take yourselves to God, and lie at his feet. Plead with him for rulers and people, his church and ministers, your friends and enemies, city and country, your towns and family; and for your own souls. Follow him day and night, and give him no rest, until he shall hear in Heaven, and have mercy, and establish his Zion as a praise both among us, and in the whole earth.

Be exhorted also now to convince poor creatures who are near you, so that they may not find their souls unready to die and eternally perish. If you are in places where you meet with the unrepentant, or open sinners on the street, those who have their consciences daily seared—improve

such a time with ignorant and unknowing ones. Many may be willing to hear you now, who would have never had a serious discourse a few days before. When they begin to see death as a real thing, and not far off—then its fears will a little cure some of their distractions. Then they will no longer take Heaven and Hell for joking matters.

This is not a time, sirs, to be ashamed of religion. Now, if ever, holiness will be in request, and boldly show itself. Afford your neighbors all the helps you can for their precious souls. Go to their houses, and lend them good books, and discourse of those matters that you may easily perceive that most concern dying men. And let that be your direction for the future in this work; which I would never have you cease. Know that those about you are mortal men whose eternity either of happiness or woe—depends on their improvement of this uncertain moment.

And lastly, all you holy souls, be encouraged cheerfully and confidently to receive the sentence of death within yourselves. Let your spirits revive within you, when you shall see the wagons that come to fetch you to *your Joseph*—even your Lord, who is gone before to prepare a place for you. Let those that have lived estranged from God, careless of his service, mad for the world, and running after their pleasures—let *them* be dejected at the news of dying. It is sad news to them that they must leave all their treasures, and their joys, and be carried into a state they did not think of, nor prepared for. There they will be reckoned with, for their worldly, loose, and jolly life—and will bear the punishments of their folly forever.

But all you to whom sin has been a burden, and religion your work and pleasure; whose hearts have been taken up with God's dealings with mankind, and deeply affected with his mysterious love in Christ; who have taken it for the business of your lives, to work out your salvation. In a word, all who have chosen God for your portion, and loved him more than all things here below, and closed with Christ as your only Savior, to deliver you both from sin and Hell, and have taken the Holy Spirit for your sanctifier and guide. You are those who do not allow yourselves to remain in known sin, but laboring in all things to approve yourselves to God—now lift up your heads, and comfort your hearts, when you see the day of death approach! Do not let worldly ones see you dismayed, for this will make them suspect that religion is a fable; so much does it contradict

your profession, and disgrace both it and you.

You do not know what kind of death by which you may leave this poor world. Do not let it be the ground of your trouble and fear. Why should not God send death for you, as well as all other things? And let it be of a blessed thought, for you have very great reason quietly to submit to it. Let Christians welcome death, for there is nothing in it which can hurt you, nor daunt you. Be very sensible of God's hand now stretched out for us, and so far manifest a reverence and awe. With a reliance on him, certainly use all due means for self-preservation. But for yourselves, do not dread the plague, nor anything it can do to you. It can only kill your bodies, and help your souls out of their prisons—and is there any hurt in that?

Let the *plague-spots*, when you see them, be regarded by you, as no other than tokens of your Father's love, which he has sent to show that he is mindful of you, and has now sent to fetch you nearer to himself. What, though it is a *rough messenger*, as jailors used to be—yet the *message* may well make you entertain him with smiles. If death came to lead you forth to execution—then indeed, you might well tremble, though not so much for itself, as the errand it came on.

O, the stark madness of those blind and miserable ones, who are afraid of the plague—and not afraid of Hell; who run away from the sickness—and run on in sin!

Why sirs, do those loathsome sores go any deeper than your flesh? Then let those who have made their carcasses their care, be troubled for this.

Why, what more do you need your bodies to do? What service do you think you shall need them for? And need you care, how the old clothes are rent and torn—so long as you shall never wear them, nor need them anymore? Part willingly with your rags—you have clothes being made of white clothing in Heaven, which shall soon silence your complaints!

Say: "Swell, and break, and stink you flesh, if you will—I shall not be troubled with you any longer! When you prospered most—then I was at the worst. You have been so much my enemy, that I cannot but rejoice in

your ruins! If my tongue must necessarily complain, and my sight, and smell is offended with myself—all this shall not reach my heart. What do I care for your sores and pains—so long as my soul is in health. Go quickly, and get to your grave, and there turn to rottenness and filth. I do not pity you, nor will ever sympathize with you!"

Do not complain of the suddenness of death. Leave complaining to those who would serve God, when they had nothing else to do, put off everything to say: Lord have mercy upon me; and a few good prayers at their last gasp. But what death can be sudden to you, who are prepared for death? You have made it the business of your lives, to fit yourselves for death.

Nor let this be your trouble that your friends forsake you, and are all afraid to come near you. Why, what would you have them do? They cannot heal your disease, or delay your death, or do anything for you in the world you are going to. Nor do you need that they should. I hope you have given them godly council in your time of health—and therefore it may less trouble you, that you cannot speak to them now. To take a solemn leave of them is a poor formality to trouble the thoughts of a dying man. Whatever help they could afford—you will quickly be past all need of it, or them. Bear the lack of their company or assistance a day or two—and you will never desire, or need it anymore. Therefore cheer up your spirits, and do not be cast down. Take yourselves to the Rock of Ages, who never failed you, nor any who placed their confidence in him. He is a present help in time of trouble. He will come in to you when your doors are shut up. He will stand by your beds-side, when no other friend dare.

Now sirs, what's your God, your Savior worth? He is just a God to support you when the world fails you. He is a Savior to relieve you, when you leave the world. Is a holy life comfortable to you? Do you now repent of the cost and pains you have been at, or the sufferings you have undergone for God? Was it not worthwhile to be mocked and laughed at for your holy diligence—which lay in store for such a day as this, and brings you support, when the hearts of others sink for fear?

Now sirs, you are come to the end of your pilgrimage; the long-looked for

day has come. Sin and Satan, the world and the flesh—shall never trouble you anymore forever! Now shall your prayers at length be all heard, your complaining ended, your expectations and longings satisfied, and accomplished. Cheer up, cheer up, brave souls—*but one step more, and then you are at your Father's house*. I think I see the arms of Christ stretched out to receive you, and angels waiting to conduct you to his arms. Do not fear, nor be dismayed. Confidently resign your souls to him—who laid down his life for you.

The darkness lasts but a little while, and shortly you will come into the open light. O, the difference you will in a moment find, between your dark and silent room, and the mansion that shall be assigned to you in your Father's house! The stateliest palace, is a loathsome dungeon compared to it. O, what acclamations and hallelujahs—what crying, *Holy, holy, holy!* What glorious praises, and loud noises! What crowns and scepters, what riches and beauties—will your ears and eyes be presently stricken with! You will be amazed and wonder. So infinitely will they exceed your highest thoughts, when faith helped you to the clearest views.

All your trials will soon be over; surprises of joy will dissipate and follow them! This is the glory, the hopes of which upheld you all your days, and the glimmerings and foretastes did so often revive you. Now you shall at length see the Lord who loved you, and gave himself for you, and whom your souls have loved. O, there is life in his smiles! All the angels and saints will bid you welcome.

There you shall enter into that throng of blessed spirits—their privileges and shall be yours. Then shall your *understandings* be enlightened, your *affections* raised, and all your *capacities* widened—and all be filled with suitable truth and goodness. The latent powers of your souls, shall then be awakened into that high celestial life. Then you shall be nearer to your Savior than the Apostle John, when he leaned on Christ's bosom. Then you shall taste the full fruits of his dear and costly love. Then, then blessed soul—you shall know, and see, and feel, and enjoy your God, and be brought as near to him as your soul can desire, and receive as much from him as your nature is capable!

The Lord your Redeemer, having by his blood and Spirit, accomplished

his whole design on you, and fitted you for Heaven—will lead you into the Father's presence, and so you shall enter on the state of constant and full communion with him. You shall always be spending an eternity in contemplating, and admiring his excellencies and glories, and singing his praises in the warm-breathings and out-goings of your heart after him, and in the ravishments of highest mutual love, and dearest delight, between your enlarged soul, and infinite essential goodness, even the God of love.

All this you shall have—but what this is, though I had time and skill to say ten thousand times more than I have done—you could not know the thousandth part, until you actually enjoy it!

Therefore with a holy impatience, and eager joy enter on the possession of all the treasures of love—which death comes to bring you into. Bid death heartily welcome. Open your bosom—and let death strike. It is but the prick of a pin—the pain is gone in a second.

See those who have already died—all pain expired with their last groan, and now they are entered on eternal joy. Farewell blessed souls, whom I hope shortly to follow, and with you to celebrate an everlasting communion in the presence, praise and love of the great Jehovah, and his son Christ Jesus, to whom in the unity of the Spirit, be rendered all honor, power, and glory, now and eternally! Amen.

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ePub and .mobi Editions October 2019 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068